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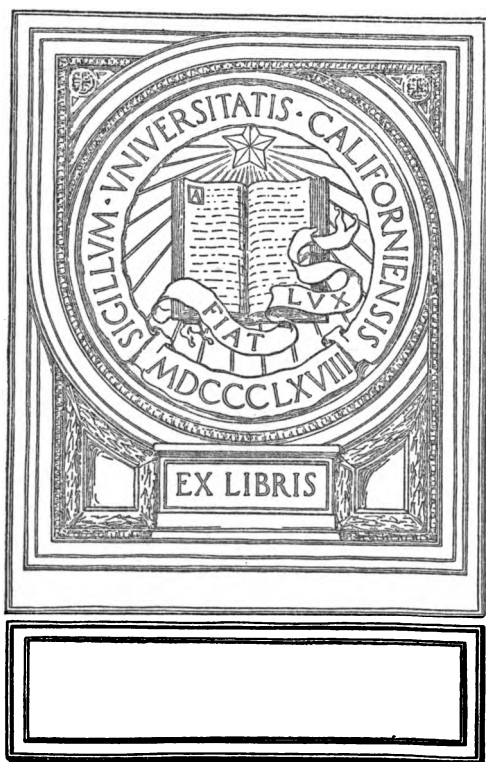
The story of Collette

Jeanne Schultz

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She had to mount on a table.

(Page 132.)

THE
STORY OF COLETTE

FROM THE FRENCH OF
LA NEUVAIN DE COLETTE



*WITH SIX FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS AND THIRTY VIGNETTES
BY JEAN CLAUDE*

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1892

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150

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
She had to mount on a table	<i>Frontispiece</i>
What occupation shall I find for myself to-morrow?	5
My portrait is easy to sketch	10
"And if I have a vocation for a religious life?"	14
I am seated with my parchments before me	18
As an infant in long clothes she resembled no other baby	20
My three sofas, for example, are all alike	27
I threw my arms about her	33
My donkey perceives with great intelligence	<i>Facing</i> 36
It is he who has given me my book	40
My dog had joined me	46
"My child," she said, "your case is not very serious"	<i>Facing</i> 48
The altar I have made for my saint is superb	<i>Facing</i> 51
I was taking off the smallest particles of dust	53
"What is that?" she cried to me, throwing up her arms	60
"In 1885, sir"	<i>Facing</i> 67
The doctor bowed his head without answering	70
Benoîte, who has been arranging his room	74
At distant intervals a band of ravens swoops down	79
Finally, I strained a cupful for him through a square of muslin	86
Do you see that image of St. Joseph?	95

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	PAGE
But the flow had begun, and had to have its course	101
A study from Nature	107
Its grandeur dates from Louis XIII and its downfall from the Revolution	110
The portrait	125
"Why are you all the time squabbling with your gentleman?"	134
Hymen	140
To begin with, Jacques, be shocked if you like	146
Then, without waiting, she attacked the fabulous bread	153
"As for you, mademoiselle," he added, looking at the old maid	159
With my little dagger I cut the name which occupies my thoughts . . .	165
With Mademoiselle Colette as a guide	171
He went on and on, raising his eyes to me every moment	<i>Facing</i> 177
I held out my hand, unable to speak	182
The writing of M. de Civreuse covered two sides	190
The end	195

THE STORY OF COLETTE.

March 1, 18—.

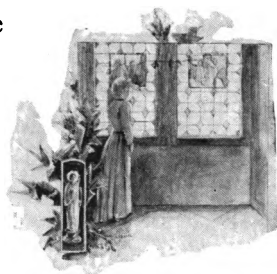
"KEEP me, O Lord, from dying of despair and *ennui*, and do not forget me, buried in this snow, which deepens every day."

I have so often said this little prayer that now my patience is exhausted, and I write it. Written words have so much more force, it seems to me; they last longer.

Also, because as a spoken phrase, which reverberates against the high sculptured ceilings of my rooms, takes more time than to think the words, so writing takes the most time of all, and I will write. This for to-day. Alas! what occupation shall I find for myself to-morrow?

My materials are scarcely sufficient, certainly not elegant. My journal has no back, the ink is dried up in the bottom of an old bottle which I have discovered, my pens are lost, and I have never had a sheet of paper here. Why should I have paper when I write to no one?

To reach the village is impossible. There are three



feet of snow on a level, without speaking of the drifts, which are high enough to bury the stage-coach to the top of the wheel.

I have read how prisoners have written with their own blood on pocket-handkerchiefs. I do not believe it, for the writing blots, and one can not read it. I know, for I have tried.

But I have mixed my dried ink with water; I have borrowed two long quills from the tail of a goose, who bore the loss with patience; and, by searching in closets, I have found some old rolls of parchment, as yellow as saffron and as thick as cardboard, which, fortunately, were written only on one side—the other was left for me. I have the advantage of reading as I write. They relate to the quarrels and lawsuits between a certain sire, John Nicolas, and a lady of Haute-Pignon, whose rabbits ravaged his clover-fields, and the limits of whose fields were always in dispute.

Give me, High Powers, as neighbor, a John Nicolas disposed to quarrel, and a domain whose borders may be always in dispute.

Are there many people, I wonder, who realize the entire meaning of the word "solitude"?

"Solitude," says the dictionary, "state of a person who is solitary"; and, again, "solitary, without company, not with others."

And that is all, no commentaries, no remarks, nothing which indicates that these words relate to one of the most terrible afflictions of existence, nothing which classifies, which says — there is solitude and solitude,

and that the most terrible is not that of the Chartreux in their cells five feet square, who have themselves chosen these dimensions and their silence; not even that of the Trappist monks, who dig their graves in their little gardens, as the years go on exchanging with each other encouraging words; but mine, that of Colette d'Erlange, who did not choose her lot in life, and who is ready to rebel against her fate.

Alone at eighteen, full of ideas, with no earthly being to tell them to; to be gay alone, to be sad alone, to be angry alone—it is insupportable.

It was less trying in summer, and even in autumn—trees and flowers understand much more than most people think. In the woods, in a nest of soft green moss, I had hundreds of voices which talked with me. The insects which crept over my cheek made me laugh by myself. Sometimes I rode on old Françoise, the mare who turns the mill-wheel, and when she could go no farther I mounted on my big dog to finish my ride—my good “One,” in whose shaggy coat I place my feet as I write, and who looks lovingly at me. Finally, there were the stars at night. I made confidants of all that look on our little corner of the earth, and, when I told them my vexations, more than one made me a sign of sympathy, which seemed to me like the look of a friendly eye.

But this wind which has been blowing for six weeks, this blockade, and the voice of my aunt, which is like the wind, more disagreeable every day, combine to drive me nearly to despair.

No imagination can resist it all. I have come to the end of all the romances I invent for myself; I am afraid that my brain is empty, and that, when I need its aid in some extraordinary adventure, I shall call in vain.

For I shall have my adventure some day—I can foretell it already.

He is tall, dark, with black hair, straight eyebrows, and severe eyes. His appearance is gloomy, his voice is imperious, and in his glance there is a singular look—Oriental for its softness, but Oriental also in the sleepy blue light as of a cimeter, or like the recollection of a terrible past; for my adventure, to reach me, will have traveled, perhaps, by strange routes.

His mustache will be small, a simple line of black pointed at the ends; and all this will be radiant for me alone with smiles and an unlooked-for grace.

Will my adventure come to me in the fields, in the brightness of the morning, or the quiet of the evening? Will it come quietly or in the midst of confusion? I do not know—I only know that it will come.

It seemed to me more probable, and certainly nicer, to find it in the days of May or June. In those months I never passed near a hedge without looking to see what it concealed; but I hope even now, and every morning, when I open my curtain, I look carefully to see if its feet have not left their traces on the snow under my window.

When I see that nothing has come, I make excuses for it to myself—the weather is so bad, the paths so hard to find! I wish it to arrive with its arms and legs unin-

jured ; I even praise it for not risking a sprain by coming a day too soon ; and I settle myself, sighing, to wait for a to-morrow, which has not yet dawned.

Then, if my faith in the future becomes too weak, I take down one of the huge volumes which fill the book-cases, which have consoled me during rainy days, and I re-read the histories of the different but always marvelous princesses in past times, who were shut up in ruined towers, but managed to escape. The analogy between their lots and mine is really striking, and I only ask that mine may have the same conclusion.

If the tower that I inhabit is not in ruins—two of the others have fallen—it may go any day. In the wood-work of my room there is a door which gives access to a secret staircase, and I have two eyes wide open and brilliant and as fit to recompense a hero as any that ever shone.

I say this without vanity or conceit, for I have never appreciated the modesty that exclaims : What a beautiful horse ! what a wonderful rose ! but which severely forbids the same remark about a face which one has certainly not made one's self—simply because it is one's own.

It is allowable, and even considered to be in good taste, for a person to abuse his nose, or to declare that his eyes are crooked ; but to say that the Creator has made them straight, the thought is horrible ! That is something of which every one should be profoundly ignorant, as if the smallest mirror or the first brook would not reveal it without the help of any one.

One leans over—one looks, and sees a beauty. Is it a crime, and would it be better to disturb the water so as to see wrinkles? The stags and the does did so this summer when they came to drink, while I was dreaming close by. When they had finished, they remained quite still for a moment, with their heads bent down, and their soft eyes fixed on their image; then they turned and bounded off, simply happy to know that their brown coats were so shining, and their antlers so well branched. After the does, I looked, and saw all that they had seen, on the same blue background, flecked by the same light clouds, and when I turned, as they did, with a bound, it was no more disagreeable to me than to them to remember my shining skin.



My portrait is easy to sketch, and resembles that of the gypsies all over the world, for my eyes are black, and my cheeks freckled, but I know the skin is white underneath. My nose is short, and seems to me to have been in such a hurry to see the world that it would not wait to be finished; there was, alas! no hurry at the rate my life runs; and my mouth is like all mouths—which are not too ugly. My only great regret is about the color of my hair, which is such a reddish blonde that it is more red than yellow, with locks which are lighter or darker, like a peasant-woman's striped skirt. If my aunt is to be believed, I shall never be tall, and she

has a way of murmuring, when I am near enough to hear, "Little woman," which brings me down to the level of the ground. The truth is that I come up to her elbow, but, as I know no man in the vicinity who reaches above her shoulder, the proportion does not seem to me very bad. And being such, and thinking thus, I am waiting in my ice-covered tower, whose feet are in the snow, for my liberator and my hero!

March 2d.

A thing of which I have often thought, but about which I have never dared to ask my aunt, is the nature of our relations to each other. Is she in my house, or am I in hers? Has she received me in her castle, or have I sheltered her in my ruin? And do the two towers and four walls which are still standing, with strength to bear their name of "Erlange de Fond-de-Vieux," belong to Mademoiselle d'Epine or to Mademoiselle d'Erlange?

As far back as I can remember we were always as we are now: she as cold, as tall, as dry, always shut up in the largest room of the château, on the sunny side and protected from the wind; I getting on as I could in the house or out of it, in the cold or rain, without apparent notice from her. With us are Benoîte, who is cook, farmer, butler, and gardener all in one, besides being my only friend, and Françoise at the mill-wheel, going at the same rate — though perhaps a little faster.

Later came my two years in the convent, those two

happy years, when I was talked to, called by my name, when my bed was one of twelve little white beds all alike, under whose coverings there were such joyous whisperings, and during which I learned many things, if I neglected some that were taught in the class-rooms. My convent, where I formed eternal friendships, where I learned to dress my hair, to use a fan, where I knew for the first time what an ideal is, and how for a man to be a hero he must necessarily be dark, pale, slightly middle-aged, gloomy, and sarcastic! Who will bring back those happy days to me?

The walls were high, but the rumors of Paris reached over them, and, on the days when visitors were allowed, we heard echoes of the world without which made our conversation all the week. Oh! those mysterious confidences among the trees of the park, which protected us like the most impenetrable jungle, but where the noise of falling leaves frightened us and made us run for safety; those games of hide-and-seek around the bases of the statues to hide from the nuns, whose censure was so dreaded but whose voices were so gentle; and the foolish notes which circulated from desk to desk under the pretense of geographical information—where shall I ever find anything so delightful? The Mediterranean Sea signified one person, the Baltic another, and we made them say and do things which overturned all the laws of Nature.

Besides the notes, there were presents—knots of blue or red ribbon pinned on white paper, which was ornamented with devices and sentiments which were the ex-

pression of an affection or a tenderness that made our hearts beat.

Then came the day when my aunt suddenly appeared, for the first time since she took me there, and brought me home without a word of warning.

Without preface, she began: "Your education is finished, and, as you have not been able to establish yourself in these two years, you must return to Erlange." Return to Erlange! I was confounded. It seemed to me that I was being put into a tomb and the cover shut down while I was still alive. "But, aunt," I stammered, "do not think I have learned anything; on the contrary, spelling, arithmetic, history—" I hesitated. I could say no more. I would have been willing not to know how to read, so that she might leave me there to learn the b, a, ba, of my speller. But nothing embarrassed her. She interrupted me in her usual way:

"If you know nothing, my dear," she said, dryly, "you have wasted your two years, and I could not conscientiously leave you here another hour! Besides, it is your own fault, and you have added to your position of a young person without fortune the charm of ignorance, which will hardly facilitate your way in life. But, thank God, I shall not have it on my conscience, for I have given you the chance of bettering your position."

She rose quickly, but with a decision which put an end to the discussion, and which plunged me in such despair that I cried out almost without knowing it:

"And if I have a vocation for a religious life?"

"In that case," she replied, turning quickly with an enigmatical smile, "I should leave you here." She

stopped a moment, then, moving toward the door without looking at me: "I give you twenty-four hours for reflection," she added, and disappeared, like a bad dream.



I had gained twenty-four hours! It seemed to me that I had peace forever. The coif and the veil of the nuns seemed to me

almost beautiful when I thought

of them as a means of snatching me from exile!

Although it was strictly forbidden, I stole to the dormitory at the first spare moment, and, with two white handkerchiefs and my black apron, I arranged on my head the coif in question.

Undoubtedly I was prettier in my ordinary dress, but there was nothing repulsive in my appearance, and the white band above my eyebrows and eyes made them, I think, appear longer and blacker. That was the first point, certainly the most important, and my resolution from that moment was irrevocably taken. During the remainder of the day I practiced the austerities which belong to my newly-chosen profession. Being sent on an errand to the infirmary, which was at the

other end of the park, I managed without being seen to go and return barefooted. I experienced no harm except some insignificant bruises; and, more and more certain of my vocation, I remember that I passed part of the night kneeling at the foot of my bed, pressing against my breast a bunch of keys, a pen-knife (shut), and an ivory paper-knife, that I had hung around my neck as a penance, the points entering into my flesh in a disagreeable manner.

Twice, when the sister on duty passed, I jumped into my bed, and the rattling of my keys attracted her, and made her bend over me for some time; but she heard such a steady, tranquil breathing, and saw eyes so tightly closed, that she thought she was mistaken, and passed on.

The next morning all was excitement in the convent. An archbishop, who had been expected some days later for the taking the veil by five novices, suddenly arrived, and the preparations for the ceremony were hastened.

How fortunate! I said to myself, while struggling to brush out the curls of my hair, which resisted in spite of all the water I employed. Heaven itself put all these tests in my way, and this evening I shall be ready to answer my aunt with a full knowledge of all that is before me. I had no chance of speaking privately to the Mother Superior that morning, and my toilet experiment caused me to be summarily sent back to the dormitory. "You are disguised as a drop of water—how charming!" said one of my companions, as we fell

into line, and at the same moment the voice of Sister Agnes was heard, but much less pleasantly :

"Mademoiselle d'Erlange," she said imperiously, "have you dipped your head in the fountain? Go immediately and dry your hair and arrange it properly."

In the dormitory I could judge of the effect of my efforts. My hair curled tighter than ever, and the water hung in drops from the ends of the curls, and wherever there was a ridge. The effect was certainly not ugly, but it was not nun-like, and I dried as well as I could the unseasonable ornament which shone like diamonds.

My exaltation went on increasing to the middle of the ceremony: the flowers, the lights, the five young girls dressed in white, whose long white-satin trains swept the ground, excited my fervor until I was impatient to be one of them.

In the distance I saw the congregation, and among them a tall young man, an officer in uniform, whose eyes seemed to me to be red.

Was he a lover come to look for the last time on her he had loved? A rumor of this kind had reached us, and it seemed to me the height of romance.

But when the five open coffins were brought, and the novices, dressed now as nuns and concealed by long black veils, were placed in them to hear the burial service, my resolution suddenly gave way. I took out my bunch of keys from my bosom, and fled without listen-

ing, and was scolded for the last time at the convent, to pack my boxes myself in all haste.

At the hour fixed I was in the parlor, bag in hand, my eyes wet with tears from the last good-byes, and laden down with cards and pictures—tokens of affection—but so resolute that Erlange appeared to me in a halo of glory, and I walked toward the door as my aunt entered.

“Well,” she said, with a gesture of surprise, “what does this mean?”

“I am ready to go,” I replied, without remarking a shade of vexation which I remembered later.

I burst into tears anew in embracing the Superior, and with my eyes obscured by weeping I passed out of the door. “Eastern,” said my aunt as we entered the carriage, and two hours after we were traveling rapidly by rail, in a silence worthy of the five new nuns who had unconsciously driven me from the convent.

At the station where we got out, the rumbling old yellow coach which ran to the village waited for us; my aunt pushed me toward it with a gesture, and, following the example of her silence, I showed her by a sign that I preferred to sit outside. “No, no,” she replied in a dry tone, “you shall not leave me any more.” At the village Françoise and the chaise were waiting for us, and the same evening, stunned by the brusque change, I found myself once more between the four walls of my room, from which I perceived to my great astonishment that all my furniture had been removed.

In the darkness of the night, my candle seemed like

a funeral taper, my footsteps resounded as in a church, and, realizing how solitary I was, I did the only reasonable thing I could do, and sitting on the floor, my two arms around my valise, I wept abundant tears, though it had seemed to me in the morning I had no more to shed. When this was done, I got up to open my window to a ray of moonlight which struck on the glass, and remarked for the first time how dark and deep is the valley which isolates us from the remainder of the country. "O God!" I could not help saying aloud, "who will come to deliver me?" And a sweet little voice, which I still hear from time to time, whispered in my ear, "He; be patient!" And since then I look for him every day, I make excuses for him every morning, and I hope for him unceasingly.

March 3d.

Certainly writing has its good side, and I am fonder than I expected to be of John Nicolas's parchments.

When I am seated with them before me, I forget,

and it seems to me that I am telling my troubles to a friendly ear.

I fancy that I have a deaf-mute before me, that writing-implements are necessary to our intercourse, and I scribble on! When I am absent from him I think of all the things I will tell him, and, when

I return to my room and begin to

speak to him, I find that one thing leads to another—that if I tell him this I must tell him that, or he will



never understand my life. Then I must go still further back, turn pages, water my bottle of ink, and the sacrificial goose must surrender more feathers if this weather lasts much longer !

I left off at my first despair and the words with which my aunt had received me in the parlor—the words that particularly struck me. “ Since you have not found means to establish yourself suitably in these two years,” she had said to me.

Was it to look for a husband that she sent me to the convent, and did she fancy that the nuns in their care for our welfare invited young men of good family and of proper age to see us on Sundays and Thursdays, who would talk with us and bring us back our balls and shuttle-cocks ?

The ingenuousness would have been great, and I could scarcely imagine such a sentiment emanating from the brain of such a woman, but it was worth while to try to find out, and in spite of the length of time it had taken me to understand it, in spite of the very real fear I have had of my aunt ever since I was a baby, I decided about two months ago to question her on the subject.

From our short interview, I came to a clearer knowledge of her character and also of her past life, of which she never speaks, having apparently no pleasant remembrances of it. This fortunate glimpse has besides given me an inkling of the lot which she designs for me, and which she arranges in such a manner quite contrary to my own intentions. I do not trouble myself much

about this, but let her make her little plans, feeling sure that I have quite strength of purpose enough to refuse to accept her projects, if it should be necessary.

Aurora-Raymonde-Edmée d'Epine has never had the consciousness of having been anything but ugly at any period of her existence. It is in vain that in looking at her I try to fancy her without wrinkles, mustache, freckles, and all that age has given her—there are certainly features which time with all its power can not change.

Besides, Benoîte is a witness, and certifies to her frightful ugliness from the cradle. As an infant in long clothes, she resembled no other baby.

The worst is, the evil was not only exterior, but it covered a temper and disposition that accorded with it. Did the ugliness come from the bad temper, or the bad temper from the ugliness? Nobody could say exactly. It was like the question of her poor digestion and bad teeth. One asks one's self in seeing her, "Which has spoiled the other?" It is certain they are equally bad.



Nevertheless, these are excuses, but the case is not always so—sometimes ugly people are amiable. The story of "Beauty and the Beast" proves it, and Benoîte says that the contemporaries of my aunt were more often repulsed by the disagreeable words she uttered than by her ugly mouth. Relatives, friends, and

strangers were treated alike, and I can believe that her name Epine gave rise to many jests. From all this, it is easy to understand that a young girl with so many defects had not an agreeable youth. Every one instinctively avoided her, and my mother had been married for years while my aunt was still waiting for the courageous man who would draw her from her celibacy. She clung to this hope with wonderful tenacity—long after another would have resigned herself; and the sense of an intolerable humiliation and anger still remains the principal sentiment of her heart.

Time has passed, but her anger and hatred remain, and she cultivates her grievance with a care she gives to nothing else. It is her cat, her parrot, her dog, the favorite of her solitary life; and I should see no harm in her occupation, unpraiseworthy as it is, if the beast she nourishes had not teeth and claws, and did not use them from time to time.

The most curious part of it all is that her resentment is not directed, as would be natural, against the authors of the evil, but against happier women who have pleased the men who had no eyes for her, and even against those who in their turn may one day marry. Does she think that in all sin one must regard the cause more than the effect? Does she consider the rogue who steals less wicked than the apple or peach which tempts him by its beauty? Or, perhaps, is this indulgence the last sign of a weakness and partiality which have been, alas! but poorly recompensed? I do not know, for I have only suffered the effects of this odd system of compensation.

This sentiment of my aunt is so powerful that it extends to all classes and all ages.

The music from a wedding in the village, if it reaches up here, drives her nearly wild ; and, on the rare occasions when she goes out, if chance places in her way a couple of lovers, or a bride leaning tenderly on her husband's arm, she follows them with a terrible look which they will hardly forget.

In fact, what she would like would be that her lot and her unhappiness should be the lot and the unhappiness of all the world ; and she is at least logical in it, for she has tenderness and care for the ugly, the unhappy, the neglected—in fact, for all in whom her selfishness sees possible companions in misfortune. But let one of her *protégées* marry, and the charm is broken !

Such is my aunt, and such are the causes of the singular life I lead with her.

What catastrophe threw me as a child into such unloving hands I only half understand, but I believe that grief for the sudden death of my father caused the death of my mother shortly after.

My Aunt Aurora (I say Aurora, for, by a bitter irony, it is the one of her names by which she is called) was the only member of her family remaining, and the care of the orphan naturally fell to her ; but, owing to the manner in which she fulfilled her duty, the charge was certainly not heavy upon her, and she simply ignored me until the moment when, I know not how, she woke to the fact that the traditional enemy, in my person, was in her home, and that, by a natural transformation, the

child would one day become a woman. If this was not the sole reason which determined our sudden departure for Erlange, it was something of the same sort, for I was hardly ten years old when she suddenly transplanted me to this rustic neighborhood—where at first everything enchanted me.

Then passed the uncertain stage of my childhood. Each change was followed by my aunt with an attention which I should like to call friendly, but I fear it was rather an uneasy curiosity that moved her. What was to develop from the muddy complexion, dull eyes, and hands and feet which never stopped growing? There was still doubt.

Unfortunately, I continued to develop, and the day that I finally shook off my shell, my aunt took me at once to the convent.

My poor mother, looking forward into my future, had exacted a promise from her sister that two years at least of my life as a young girl should be spent in Paris, and this was the ingenious manner of executing a promise to the dead without going against her own wishes. I am persuaded that nothing would have made her break her word, but she kept it in this way without the slightest scruple, and now it is considered that I have seen all that there is to be seen of Paris!

When the time was ended, she came to tear me from my worldliness, and brought back to Erlange the niece whom no one wanted to marry, and who, she thanks Heaven, will perhaps walk in her footsteps!

This being the case, one may judge whether my

proposition to stay in the convent suited her. A nun—it was the best solution, one which would not in any way hurt the feelings of her susceptible self-love. The veil is not a husband! and young girl and nun come next each other when one tells one's fortune with a daisy; besides, any young girl can take the veil. The convent is less exacting than a man, and does not demand beauty of face in the person who is buried there; and I certainly caused more emotion in the breast of my aunt during those twenty-four hours than I had succeeded in doing before since my birth.

But in the interval my dream of a vocation had vanished, and she had no choice but to keep my eighteen years beside her. A neighborhood which she liked so little that I can not help thinking that she saw in her mind's eye the coxcombs of her youth, and thought of the jokes these wits would have made on seeing us together—the bud on the prickly branch, alas! long past its prime.

If these are not exactly the words she used in speaking to me, for few people expose their own weaknesses so completely, the sense is scrupulously preserved; and I am certain, from my own remembrances, those of Benoîte, and what my aunt said herself, that I have sketched her exact character in the past, in the present, and even, alas! in the future.

Since that time, life here has resumed its course, or rather its stagnation, and my aunt considers it her duty to shower words regularly on me, which ring like handfuls of earth on a coffin, in order to convince me that

Colette is dead, and needs nothing more in this world than a *De Profundis*.

And I let her go on. But Vive Dieu! as the most charming of our kings used to say. Let her beware, for I am not dead yet, and I mean to prove it to her some day.

March 4th.

My good John Nicolas, it snows still, and still harder, and the thermometer has gone lower down! I wonder if it says truly, or whether, in taking it in from the window this morning after breakfast, I accidentally touched the shoulder of my aunt with it? I do not know, but I am thinking of burning my chairs so as to make a bigger fire in my fire-place!

To complete my misfortunes, my remembrances of past months, which I have written during the past three days, must have escaped from my room like a flight of bats or rooks, for the increased bad humor of my aunt can not be explained otherwise, and her predictions of the future have never taken a less amiable form.

Solitude and poverty, for it seems that I am poor; walls of stone and walls of forgetfulness—she sums up all the obstacles which separate me from the rest of my race with a joy which she can not conceal; and when she exposes in her paroxysms of gayety her long teeth, with decayed spots which make them look like dominoes, I shudder and think of an ogress.

Everything is not shadow, however, in her predictions: she finds charming words to trace the picture of

our two lives lasting indefinitely thus and finishing almost together ; and at this point, so as not to burst into tears, I have to look at the windows, to assure myself that there are no bars such as they use to keep the little birds from escaping when they have neither strength nor courage, and would die for want of food on the roads.

The bitter waters have destroyed her illusions ; and, whether I will or no, she wants me to drink in my turn ! If fate will not force me to it, she will herself stir the cup of *Quassia amara*, where all becomes bitter. Undoubtedly, the planets which have traced my horoscope seem to her too indulgent, for she hopes to efface all the bright lines in it, so as to bring it down to the level of her own.

The men of '93 asked nothing more, after all. What they wanted was that every one should be as miserable as they were, and, to make sure that no one should dine when they were hungry, they seized the roast. But to think that a *Mademoiselle d'Epine* could wear the Phrygian cap is a difference !

While waiting for events, I decide to refurnish. An accident disclosed to me a fact which I had suspected—that my softest arm-chairs and least dilapidated cabinets ornament my aunt's room. In spite of her efforts, the door stood ajar, and one of those blasts of wind which scatter the branches of our trees like straw from the thrasher, threw it wide open as I passed.

It was a little palace.

My aunt must have consecrated the two years of my

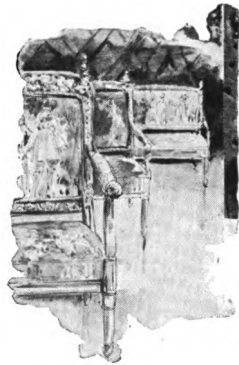
absence to making her nest, so soft and beautiful it seemed, only she did it with material that was not her own, like a thieving bird. I have ceased to look for the tapestry of the dining-room, and the few cushions of the salon—I know where they are!

Under such circumstances, delicacy seemed to me out of place; so I began to bring into my room all that my arms, aided by those of Benoitte, could move—four arms with the force of six! And my walls were furnished.

On the other hand, the rooms between are left bare, and from the right wing to the left wing there is a huge desert in which we are guided on our way by our camp-fires at the two extremities. The dining-room is the only place we have in common, where I have respected the silver, the porcelain, and the chairs! Seats, besides, are not wanting—I have a great many, if not much variety.

My three sofas, for example, are all alike. They are of carved oak gnawed by the mice, which have rather interfered with the details of the sculpture; and have coverings of green tapestry, on which beautiful ladies and helmeted knights converse in a garden whose walks lead steeply up to nothing.

The pointed head-dresses of the ladies often touch the tops of the trees, and all the faces are in profile—



the full face being doubtless too difficult to accomplish in tapestry; but the effect is not less gay. I have arranged each sofa in a panel of the wall, and my room is so long that by the time I have reached the second I have forgotten how the first looked. From the first, it would be possible to see the sun rise; the second is opposite the west; and from the third I can see the moon, if there still is a moon; but to-day from all three I have seen only falling snow, and I should have been glad of a fourth on which I could go and cry.

One can hardly count my tables. My aunt does not care for tables, so I had many to choose from. There are round ones, square ones, all shapes and colors, and "One," who has, I am afraid, some of my vagabond tastes, tries lying under each in turn. From underneath the smallest he can hardly get out, and in getting up he finds himself caught, and, making a bound, flies from the room, howling dismally and sending the little drawers flying. But he will soon come back and furnish me with the carpet of which my feet had never greater need; if not, would he deserve the name I have given him, and which in its single syllable signifies so much?

Formerly, when he was young, I called him Pataud, an unpretending name, which I chose because of his heavy gait and big head; but I know the world better now, and when I came back here, and had passed my friends in review who still remembered me, and proved it—only one remained, and that was he! Hence his name.

To go back to my furniture, I completed it with six

prie-Dieu which I found all together. They have twisted columns and red-velvet cushions with gold tassels, on which the traces of knees remain. I lost myself in reflections over these two hollows, imagining the history and thoughts of those who made them, but I only find a frightful smell of dust, and moths fly out of them with a frightened air, heavy still with their long repast.

One of these prie-Dieu I take and put aside for its original use, but the others must take the place of all the furniture which I need—low chairs, cozy-chairs, arm-chairs. They, differing only by the names I give them, help my illusions, and I could, if necessary, seat twelve persons at once—if they were here.

My poor Benoîte is in despair trying to arouse me. When she sees me completely overcome with melancholy, she employs her last resource; and she insinuates gently, edging toward the door in case of need, "Do you want to come and make cakes, Colette dear?" But I soon get tired of spoiling the dough and soiling my fingers with the butter, and I seat myself on the hearth while she does the work.

Another time she lets me try her knitting—an interminable stocking, the stitches of which I can count at a distance; but I do not like knitting any better than cooking, and the good old soul is reduced to telling me old nursery stories to make me laugh: "Once upon a time there was a king and a queen." But, for the love of Heaven, where are they now, this king and queen, and, since they had no children, why did they not adopt me?

March 5th.

This morning there was an excitement, and I laugh again all by myself when I think of it. The provision of ham and other salt meat was exhausted, and my aunt, who is very fond of them, sent an order to the village that some should be sent, so that about nine o'clock a wagon with a linen cover, with the snow above the wheels and all the bells jingling, entered the court. It was Bidouillet arriving with his provisions.

A new face, a new voice, some movement in the court ; it seemed to me that a curtain from a new scene had been raised, and I rushed excitedly down-stairs.

"Ah! Monsieur Bidouillet, it is you, and you have brought some sausages?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle."

And the little old man turned toward me confused and stupefied, with his mouth open and his eyes full of astonishment, looking out from under his fur cap with his merchandise in his arms, while his son, who had been trying to rub the horse's legs dry with a wisp of straw, stopped like a mechanical toy that has broken its spring.

Evidently they were both struck with my singularity. The warmth of my reception greatly astonished them, and I am sure that at the present moment they credit me with a passion for ham and sausages which I have never possessed ; but, after one has waited three months for some one to talk to, one does not let him slip so easily, and, while Bidouillet, who is no great talker, followed Benoîte, I seized on the boy whom I had taken in to warm himself.

“What do they do in the village? How do you pass your time? And do they think that the snow will last much longer?”

But the more I asked the more mute he became, his mouth stretched in a perpetual grin, and he was so heartily amused at my expense that his gayety became contagious, and we both laughed like two simpletons.

After that he became confidential. He answered my questions, and now I know that in the village during the day the people prepare seeds, and put their plows and agricultural implements in order; and in the evening they go to one another's houses, where there are heaps of nuts to be cracked and apples to be pared and cored. When the work is finished, they roast chestnuts in the ashes and drink some white wine, and go home to bed contentedly.

It seems to me that I smell the feast from here, and I will open my window this evening to try to hear the merriment from afar—like the poor wretch who ate his crust with a better relish from the odor of the roast which he envied.

As for the snow, it may continue or it may stop, for it is certain that with the first ray of the sun it would end. I think I might have found that out for myself, and I had supposed that among the peasants there were knowing ones who could foretell the weather.

“And when you are alone in the evenings, my boy, what do you do?” I asked at length.

“We say our prayers.”

“And when you have finished?”

"When I have finished, ah, my faith, Mamselle Colette, I am already asleep."

Then we laughed again, and then we began to talk of the flocks.

"Have the Bidouilletts many? What are they? And who takes care of them?"

He described the sheep one by one like a careful shepherd—as he is; and when he added that the work would be doubled in summer, there were so many lambs—

"Will you not need a shepherdess?" I asked him. "If so, I know one who would take the place, and who would not be too exacting about pay."

Immediately he assumed the cunning look of the peasant who scents a good bargain, and with an indifferent tone:

"Perhaps," he said. "Does she belong here, Mamselle Colette?"

"Certainly she does," I answered, "for it is I."

For this time it was our last word! Astonishment seized him again, and I could not draw even a motion from him until his father called him from downstairs:

"Hello boy, are you there?"

I leave you to guess his answer, and what he must have related on their homeward way.

"Remember me when you need some one," I called to him as the wagon passed the door. "I was in earnest you know," and I came running back delighted with my morning.

Just now I met Benoite in the hall, and, in spite of the pile of plates she carried, I threw my arms about her, calling out:

"Rejoice, Benoite, we will crack nuts all this evening."

"Nuts," she replied—"what for? Do you want to eat them?"

"No, no, my poor old dear; to amuse ourselves! It seems it is a very amusing thing to do."



She went off shaking her head, but she has promised to bring some down from the garret and to find two hammers, and we will crack nuts by the fire.

March 6th.

For a week our two cows have been sick. The thing does not seem funny nor even interesting, but it has been the means of making me pass the best day I have had in a long time.

The first day they were ill we drank tea, the second coffee, and Benoite spoke of a soup for the third morning; but Mademoiselle d'Epine does not like privations, and she sent word to a milk-woman in the village who since then has brought the necessary amount of milk on her donkey every morning.

This morning, as she arrived late, I was up when she came, and I was looking at her measure her milk when my aunt rang violently. It is rare that the huge bell which rings from her room to the kitchen is heard

out of the regular hours, but when it happens, it is a sign of something unusual ; and Benoîte, who suspected the reason, took as a precaution her bottle of liniment, guessing the return of a rheumatic pain in the left shoulder, which requires, as soon as it comes, repeated and vigorous rubbing.

Meanwhile the old woman had emptied her can, all our pitchers were filled, and she was ready to go.

"Did you bring too much?" said I, seeing in the other pack a second can quite full.

"Excuse me, Mamselle Colette, there is just what is necessary."

"For us?"

"Not for you ; for other people whose cows are dry too."

"What ! You are going higher up?"

"Yes, mamselle, up to the Nid-du-Fol."

She put on her sabots while she was speaking, shivered a little as she thought of the cold outside, took up her measure and was almost gone, when suddenly, irresistibly, the idea seized me to take her place on the donkey, to go and distribute the milk myself in her name, and so to take a delightful ride in the falling snow. Only to think of it made me wild with joy ; all the accumulated impatience of these days when I had been shut up rushed over me, and I imagined the donkey trotting in the soft snow, the wind beating on my face, and the astonishment of the people up there at the change of persons.

The good woman, to whom I had briefly explained

my plan, cried, protested, and called Benoîte in vain. I paid no attention to her, and got ready at once. Besides, our walls are so thick, I was sure my nurse would not hear, and I was certain that, even if she wanted to say no, I could make her say yes.

At the same time, I completely won over the old woman by installing her near the fire, and showing her her red nose, blue lips, and swollen hands, and persuading her that an hour's rest and heat were just what she wanted to restore her. I assured her that I would take good care of her milk and of her donkey, and that I knew the road perfectly, and where all her customers lived; and, before she could offer any more objections, I had her cloak over my shoulders, her hood over my head, and her stick in my hand—which you may be sure I used effectually.

For the first quarter of an hour it was delightful: the donkey trotted gently along, the falling snow touched my cheeks as lightly as down, and I sang at the top of my voice with the gayety of a professional muleteer. But, little by little, the road became steeper, and the stones concealed under the snow made us stumble, and on turning a corner a sudden gust of wind sent my cloak to the right, the hood to the left, and forced me to dismount to arrange my apparel. The wretched donkey seized the occasion to continue his route, while I pursued him, uttering all the exclamations I know:

“Oh! Whoa! Stop!”

When caught, it was difficult to mount him. The

pack turned, there was nothing solid to catch hold of, and I placed my feet on a dozen little elevations before finding one which was not all snow into which I would sink up to my knees; and at last when, seated on this tottering throne, I utter a cry of triumph, the donkey is seized with a fit of obstinacy. His four feet seem rooted to the ground, and in vain I urge him with my voice, or the switch, or my heel—he is like a tower, except for the occasional jumps which he executes, and which make the milk spout from the can so that I am sprinkled with a mixture of milk and snow up to my ears. Then I try all known exclamations to make him move:

“Get up! Go on! P-r-r-r—” up to the moment when, our two minds being agreed, he suddenly starts.

At Nid-du-Fol the wind is a cyclone, and the snow falls in a solid mass, and, when we arrive at the first house, my nose and lips are like those of the old woman.

Everybody cries out, tries to warm me, but, as the air is getting colder, and they say there will be a tempest before long, I start back almost immediately. The hill is hard to go down, the snow, which is freezing, is hard to get over, and sliding and falling we arrive as best we may half-way down, when the final catastrophe takes place.

My donkey perceives with great intelligence that safety, which is impossible for the two of us, is still possible for him; he lets slip his four feet at once, rolls over, and deposits me in a deep hollow where the bed



My donkey perceives with great intelligence.

of snow receives me like a mattress, but where I am more entangled than in a nest of feathers, while he starts off at a gallop that shakes the ground.

It was certainly funny, and my first impression was one of amusement, for I thought I could get up as soon as I liked—but probably the shock had slightly stunned me, for in spite of all my efforts I found it impossible, and I felt myself so helpless that I compared myself, I remember, to a May-bug turned on its back with its feet in the air.

All my limbs were powerless, and gradually it seemed to me as if my intelligence and will melted and ran out of me like the snow that dissolved on my fingers, and that my head was gradually getting empty of all I was accustomed to find in it.

Otherwise the position was not disagreeable. The depth of the hole preserved me from the wind, and my bed, in spite of its coldness, was soft, so soft that I sank farther and farther in, and, very gently, other flakes falling, covered me like a corpse that they cover softly over.

As time passed, I felt the cold less; I liked the sleep that was stealing over me, and, in spite of the distinct impression I had that I should never be taken out, I did not feel afraid, and I could willingly have smiled.

Only my lips refused to move, and I experienced what statues must experience, if statues ever think—a desire to move an arm which is in marble, and can not move, words which can not pass a throat that has not been animated, and ideas which can not work in a brain

that is petrified and where nothing moves. Then little by little—a blank! and it seemed to me that I was no longer a girl in flesh and blood, but a mass of lead, so heavy I seemed.

I do not know how long this suspension of life lasted. Was it an hour, a day?—it matters little. I think I should have suffered no more if it had been prolonged, and, when I regained my consciousness, I was very near being angry because so comfortable a rest had been interrupted.

On one side of my bed was great grief—it was my poor Benoitte; on the other, I feel a moist nose which forces its way under the sheet, and thus I come back to life between my two best friends. On one of my sofas, disregarding the dignity of my beautiful ladies, the milk-woman is sobbing, and one of my first observations is that her hands are as red as ever. Why has she not warmed them in all this time?

In the meanwhile I am still a little doubtful. Is my bed of snow or wool? But on stretching out my hands I touch on each side bottles of hot water, and a series of them down to my feet. It is a cremation. It is useless to speak of the reaction one experiences after great cold; I should certainly not have felt this heat in my ditch. I believe decidedly that I am at home.

Besides, the only familiar face wanting to complete the picture comes out of the shadow, and I hear the voice of my aunt:

“She is crazy, raving mad, and I repeat to you that I can do nothing with her! But, really, she might have

reflected that we are not organized for taking care of frozen people here."

So, I am frozen. This idea impresses me, and, while the door is closed by the amiable hand I know so well, all the stories that I have heard flash upon my mind, and I have visions that make me shudder, of toes coming off with the boots, and hands falling off with the gloves. Good Heaven! where have mine been left? It seems to me that I am in spun glass, and, seized with fright in thinking of my fragility, I dare not move, until a cry of joy from my old nurse, on hearing me breathe, makes me laugh in spite of myself.

My lips are solid. I risk putting out my arms toward her, and I find with pleasure all my fingers attached to my hands. It is a delightful moment.

Then comes my story—a terrible story, like that of rescues on the Mont St. Bernard, where the dog in the person of "One" plays his part; and I learn that, next to the dog, I owe my life to the rapid galloping of the donkey on his return journey.

A little hesitation, a little less force, the print of his hoofs being three quarters filled up, which they followed in coming to look for me, and I should have stayed in my hole until next spring!

After the tears and pity, the scolding came as a matter of course, and Benoîte vowed that she would never forgive me.

Her tone is so serious this time that I think I shall have to wait until I kiss her for good-night, to make my peace and to see her tenderness come back.



Meanwhile she fills me with hot tea, which she brings without looking at me, and offers turning her head away; and in the intervals "One" waits on me all alone. It is he who has given me my book, pen, even my bottle of ink, and that without even soiling the points of his teeth; it is half to him, my mute listener, that I tell all this.

March 7th.

If it were not for the zealous watch Benoîte keeps on me I would go back to my hole, for really anything is preferable to the life I lead here.

No ill effects have remained of my adventure. I have not even sneezed, and all I have gained is that I have no longer the right to pass the threshold without my dog's holding me by the dress, and howling until Benoîte arrives and makes me come in.

Just now I took up the book with the story of the princesses who lived long ago, and I found that I knew it by heart, for, without turning the first page, I continued the phrase I was reading, and I am afraid I must wait for weeks to forget it sufficiently. The calendar which I made for myself, where I effaced a day each night, went too slowly for me. I have made another for all the hours of the day, and, although the occupation is twelve times more frequent, I catch myself moving the

hands of the clock so as to have the pleasure soon of passing my pen through the hour that I kill.

Certainly, this can not go on.

The roads will not always be blocked, and I will then find some way to occupy my time, even if I have to travel about the country with a peddler's pack on my back!

I have thought about doing it; I have even thought what I could take. But there is so little of anything here. After much searching I have found ten old silk dresses in the closets, and in a box some ends of old lace—but what would our peasants do with such things?

A life I have dreamed of is that of a servant at the village inn! To see people every day, to be always active, to be always able to talk; to laugh and to work from morning to night—that is a life worth living! But would they take me at the inn? That is what I do not know.

In the meanwhile sadness makes me weak.

I make concessions, compromises. I find myself sacrificing something in the color of my ideal, which up to the present I have been so decided about. I have even thought of blonde hair with blue eyes, and a good-natured look, a small beard, a small person—anything, in fact, if he will take me from here.

Solitude enervates, and I begin to understand that one can be tortured so as to deny one's firmest convictions.

My torture at first appeared light to me, but finally

—finally, I think it would make me pass through the circle of a ring if I thought I could escape from it in that way.

March 8th.

My friend the milk-woman has just been here to ask for me, and came up to my room to assure herself that I had escaped in good health.

She hardly believed her eyes, and confessed that for an hour she had thought I was dead.

How strange things are! I have not even a scratch, but the donkey, who thought he was doing so well for himself, has to be kept in the stable in consequence of a terrible cold, straw all about him, and warm drink served in his drinking-trough.

The good woman does not worry about him. He is subject, it appears, to such small ailings, and, with his feet warmly wrapped up, he gets quickly over them.

So all is for the best, and I made my visitor sit down, delighted to have a human being to talk to, and resolved to make her stay as long as I could.

Naturally, my adventure came up, and I laughed in listening to her exclamations of fright and pity.

"It is certain," she said, with a thoughtful air, "that for a young person the life here is not gay, and one can understand that sometimes you try to get out of it."

She thought about it for some time, then very simply she inquired if I did not think that the best thing for me would be to marry and go away, and whether my aunt was not trying to do something about it.

I answered no, and this time very seriously; and as

she went out of the door I heard her mutter to herself, "The Mother Lancien could, perhaps, give some good advice." I did not think of questioning her then, but I am in a hurry for to-morrow to come, so that I can find out who this Mother Lancien is who gives good advice, and who, according to my milk-woman, may help me.

March 9th.

It seems to me that one of the tiles of my roof has been taken off, and that for the first time I see blue sky, and that I can already reach out my arm—the revelations of my old woman have given me such hope.

To-morrow I will have the advice of Mother Lancien, if I know myself; and, if the oracle of this sibyl does not help me, it must be that my case is desperate, and there is no more hope for me. I will then struggle no longer, but clasp my hands and say, Amen!

Why did I not hear of such a woman before? I can only explain it to myself by seeing how little the bats and owls among our ruins know of what is going on in the neighboring dove-cote.

However, the veneration in which she is held is so great, it might have reached us; one should hear my milk-woman talk of her. When she spoke about her just now, one thought of a Levite unveiling the altar before an attentive crowd; and, on listening to her, I caught myself getting up to bow each time that her name was spoken, as we used to bow during vespers at the *Gloria Patri*, our heads all bending at the same moment, like wheat when the wind passes over it. It was not that I

felt like laughing. I shall always venerate the magic wand, whether it be of hazel or cedar, and I already respect the cap of my counselor.

Death, marriage, birth. This woman is interested in whatever takes place in the village. Is it she who blesses the young couples, and distributes to each child its lot in life? I am tempted to believe it is, and, if I were born at Erlange, I would go and complain to her of what I have received.

She is something of a doctor, taking away the practice of the one from the city ; she mends and cures like a fairy. Sprains, cuts, malignant fevers, she cures all ; and, as her plasters smell of tallow, and her medicines of mint and thyme, and her prescriptions are given in *patois*—all things the rustics know—every one has confidence and takes them.

Besides, she is not exclusive ; she receives all patients, and more than one is brought to her from the hen-house or the stable.

She knows the mixture to give so that a hen shall lay at the proper time, the feed that fattens and that which is hurtful, and there is no doubt that, if she had been employed soon enough, our cows would never have known the humiliation of being dry.

To complete an enumeration of her qualities, and what touches me more directly, her skill does not stop with material concerns ; there is no affair, however troublesome it seems, that she can not arrange. Like handsome Percinet in the fairy-tale, who could sort three barrels of humming-birds' feathers with three waves of

his wand, she finds remedies for troubles with equal facility ; and the most unbelieving, those who go to her as a last resource, come away satisfied.

So that the procession never ceases—animals that are dragged by the halter, sick people that are led by the arm, or patients who come to consult her at twilight.

A holy woman, a good woman she is, if there ever was one, whose magic is no black-art, and who has no witch's stew, and who has even time to go and burn candles for the needs of her clients !

I will certainly see her to-morrow, even if Benoîte sleeps before my door to hinder my going out. Besides, my poor old nurse will only hear about it afterward, I hope ; I arrange my plans in the dark, and I prepare my pilgrim's staff and cape most secretly—to such an extent that I do not even let " One " into the secret. I suspect his too great zeal, and there are cases where a dog may say too much, in spite of his enforced reserve.

Behind the door where I have shut him up he whines piteously, and scratches so violently that I think he hopes to make a hole through which he can see. But I am watching, and, the better to keep my secret, I shall not speak of it any more, even to myself, until to-morrow.

March 10th.

There is certainly some secret affinity between the snow and me, and it was very near keeping me in custody again this morning.

But I had something better this time to do than to go to sleep in the wind. The man who carries a treas-

ure, and he who goes empty-handed, walk very differently. I struggled, and here I am!

I got out very easily. With Benoit engaged in a serious cleaning, and "One" shut up in a closet, I was safe.

With my dress well taken up, my mountain-shoes, and a cloak fit for a grandmother on my shoulders, I was ready to go to Siberia, and never was there a gayer walk.



Besides, I had not taken five hundred steps when a black ball rolled over and over on the road—and my poor dog had joined me.

Had he knocked over the wardrobe, broken down the door, or torn off the lock? I do not know, but from the moment that I was certain that he had not spread the news of my escape, and that no one was following me, I confess that I was delighted to have him with me along the road, and to be able to discuss with him all we were going to do and say.

The house of the Mother Lancien is a little way from the village, in a small grove of pine-trees, whose branches spread out so as almost to form a second roof. The snow is well trodden down on the path that leads to it, and I am sure that in summer the grass is well

worn. For some reason, I headed the procession this morning, and my solitude promised me a long conference.

While I knock gently at the door, I look swiftly in at the window. The prophetess is there, sitting by the hearth. Before her are five or six smoking saucepans, and farther back a big pot whose cover the good woman lifts delicately to smell the odor. Ha! that smells of fresh meat, it seems to me! A little shiver runs down my back, and, without knocking again, I step back a little. But, bah! sorceresses know everything! Through the wall this one sees me; she gets up, opens the door, looks at me a moment crouching against the wall and abashed as a little hungry chimney-sweep, and, without more astonishment than if I had come to her for the twentieth time, says—

“Mamselle Colette? Come in and warm yourself a little; the wind is bitter this morning!”

Then she settles me in a large straw-seated arm-chair, and, while “One” stretches himself at my feet, extending his paws luxuriously on the warm hearth, she sits down again in her place opposite me.

At the first moment, I must say I was much embarrassed. I had thrown my cloak on the back of my chair, and the melting snow was dripping down my back, but I did not think of retreating.

She, during this time, arranged the fire, brushed up the ashes, without speaking; then at the moment when, being no longer able to control myself, I was going to say some stupid thing—

"Do you like them hot?" she asked, quietly, uncovering the big pot again, and taking out some potatoes just cooked.

Where the skin was cracked, the mealy part—almost silvery, it was so white—was bursting out in little rolls, and the rose-colored steam nearly filled the room.

By this time my embarrassment was gone, and little by little, and interrupting myself to blow on my fingers or to change my potato from hand to hand, I told her my troubles, and asked her advice.

Mother Lancien listened quietly to the end without even a gesture, her arms crossed over her head, and with an expression which became more and more smiling.

"My child," she said, when I had finished, "your case is not very serious, and I know of hardly any that are at twenty; but I am afraid the good people about here have deceived you as to what I can do, and that you credit me with a power that does not belong to me. My remedies are very simple, and you could find just as good ones, perhaps better, if you looked for them.

"In cold weather like this, for example, I force people with fevers and coughs to stay in bed—all who have no reason for being out; and at the same time I send out all the men with sanguine temperaments, those who like to sit by the fire and smoke their pipes. In both these cases the remedy is good, and Mother Lancien has the reputation of working a miracle. It is



"My child," she said, "your case is not very serious."

the same with all the rest. Between ourselves we can say—can't we—that it is not a difficult matter.

"Now you are offended, and you think that, if you had known this before, you would not have taken this long walk to find an old woman who can do so little! Perhaps, however, we shall find what you need.

"If the times of fairies and enchanters are passed, there are still good geniuses ready to help us in our troubles, and it is to them that I advise you to go. God forbid that I should speak lightly of them, or compare them to those that were invented long ago! But in this case, where no one on earth can help you, why have you, my young lady, forgotten the saints in Paradise?"

"The saints in Paradise!" I confess this stupefied me, and that if Mother Lancien had drawn from her bread-box a young and handsome cavalier with a pointed mustache and plumed hat in hand, it would hardly have astonished me more. However, as she was awaiting my answer, I replied, "I did not think of them."

"Very well," she said, "it is just as I supposed."

And she began to explain to me so clearly how one obtains in praying all one desires—how one must go to work; of whom to ask such a favor, and of whom another—that it really seemed as if she had lived familiarly with the great saints of whom she spoke, and that she understood all their feelings.

"When you were a child," she said, "whom did you ask to give you the fruit that grew out of your reach on the trees? Was it not taller people than

you? But you are grown up, and large enough to help yourself to what you want on the earth; but for that which is still out of your reach, do as you used to do, ask some one higher still, for there will always be things which you can not attain."

She spoke so simply but so grandly, if one may use the word, that, without prejudice to our *curé*, I may say it was better than any of his sermons; and her faith was so real and so contagious, that my heart beat in listening to her, and it seemed to me that up in the sky, through the little window-panes, I saw all the inhabitants of Paradise, with their hands half open, smiling to me from afar, and ready, as soon as I asked them, to send me all the things at their disposal.

Why I had never thought of them I can not imagine; and when I think of the place which my *neuvaine** holds at present in my life and in my heart, I am tempted to weep for my lost time.

But it is not worth the while now. Nine days are so soon over, and they seem so short when one knows that happiness is at the end of them!

The Mother Lancien told me that it is to Saint Joseph that I ought to address myself, as it is not within the memory of man that he has rejected such a prayer as mine. Only, the prayers must be frequent and the faith unwavering.

Unwavering faith I certainly have, as if the saint himself had pledged his word, and for an empire I would not prolong my prayers half an hour beyond the

* Nine days' prayer.



The altar I have made for my saint is superb.

nine days. Moses paid too dearly for the thoughtlessness of the second stroke of his rod on Horeb. I will keep to one. Only, I will strike conscientiously, and I will find such convincing words that perhaps the waters will gush out before the end of the nine days.

Oh, this Mother Lancien! I worship her. And, if she likes, I will find a place for her in the carriage that takes me away.

March 11th.

The altar I have made for my saint is superb; a whole corner of my room is transformed by it.

What gave me the most trouble was to find a statue of him, and in despair I was going to take one of Saint John the Baptist in his stead, and beg him to allow himself to be prayed to as Saint Joseph, when I discovered what I needed in a corner of the chapel.

The statue is small, in silver, and the lovely little branch of lilies that he holds in his hand has all the grace of natural flowers.

By putting several things under it, I succeeded in making it higher than the candelabras, and at a distance, dimly seen high up, it appears still smaller, half lost in the sky.

In front I have put branches of holly with red berries gathered from above the snow in the park, and all my *prie-dieu*, which I will not put to any profane use any more.

March 12th.

How will he come to my aid? Under what form will he send my liberator? I can not even make a

guess, and I lose myself in dreams as to how a saint can manage from heaven to come to the aid of a Colette here in the mountains.

In what mysterious way will he cause a stranger to venture here? And how will this personage present himself? Will he ring the big bell at the entrance, and to announce himself will he say to Benoîte, "Here I am, mademoiselle; it is I who have been sent by Saint Joseph"?

I wonder and wonder until I give it up.

Then I am afraid that my surmises and questionings are not the complete faith which Mother Lancien said was necessary. "Blind faith," she said. Then I shut my eyes and ears, and think of nothing.

March 13th.

I say my prayers so often, I kneel in front of my statuette so many times in the course of the day, that I am sometimes afraid of wearying him with my monotony, and I rack my brains to vary my formula.

I turn my phrases, and put new words to the same idea; I choose my expressions with the coquetry of a careful writer, and I wish I knew several languages, so as to say my prayer in the morning in French, at noon in Italian, and at night in Spanish, to give variety.

As the days go on, my hope becomes a certainty.

Only five days more!

March 14th.

In spite of myself, there are moments when I lose my calm. The event, which is approaching so rapidly, and which will change all my life, moves and agitates me.

It seems to me that I ought to begin to make some preparations for it, and this morning I began to arrange my wardrobe, and the little ornaments that I am fond of.

While I was busy, Benoîte came in, and as she looked at me while I was folding two summer dresses, she said, laughingly, "Are you going away, my dear Colette?"

I did not answer, for I consider that I have not yet the right to confide in her; but she did not know how truly she spoke.

March 15th.

Certainly, my saint and I understand each other better every day. This morning, as I was taking off the smallest possible particles of dust with my finest cambric handkerchief, it seemed to me that there was a smile in his eyes, and that he moved his branch of lilies slightly as a sign of encouragement.

March 16th.

Is there something new in my face or manner, I wonder? for my aunt looks at me uneasily.

I looked in the glass to see what I could have revealed; I only saw my cheeks a little rosier, and my eyes a little darker. It seems to me that all my colors are richer, and that everything about me heralds the approach of the great event.



My poor "One" does not understand in the least what I am about. Formerly, when I kneeled on the floor it was to get nearer him, and he rolled himself up, ready to play, or to serve as a cushion. Now I force him to be absolutely silent, and my finger is always raised when he approaches me.

March 17th.

My agitation increases, and I do not know what new thing to do to show my fervor.

My faith constantly grows stronger, so that I am even afraid it may become presumption, I feel so quiet and certain. I begin to count on my fingers the three cardinal virtues, but stop at faith.

Faith moves mountains, it is said; why, then, should it not make the small breach in my walls that would enable me to get out?

All seems favorable, and significant coincidences are not wanting.

Of all the months of the year, this counsel was given to me in the month of March, the month of Saint Joseph, and this nine days' prayer, which was begun by accident, without premeditation, almost without reflection, will be ended on the *fête*-day of the saint!

Without being too sanguine, or being too eager, I may say that it is evident that this was arranged for me—a silent guardianship of which I understand perfectly the value, and know what the result will be!

March 18th.

The wind blows, the snow falls in masses, and before this immaculate covering I am frightened to think of the risks of my poor traveler.

Sometimes it seems to me that this aspect of nature is a picture of my life: level and colorless like the pure white snow that covers the fields—waiting for the marks of footsteps! Then I forget analogies in thinking of the present moment—the practical side of it all.

Will he be able to make out his way between the two lines of hill; and if an accident happens to him as to me, and he loses his footing suddenly on the edge of some ditch, who will come to warn me?

If I had still time, I would look for another saint, and I would pray him to lighten his way with a little sunshine, to make the journey less difficult.

But that would be to doubt, and perhaps my own saint would be angry—so I trust myself to him entirely!

March 19th.

The day of the commencement of my new life, the day of destiny for me! I am all agitation, and it seems to me that my blood is boiling in my veins and ready to burst forth.

My prayers even do not tranquillize me. To-day I kneel in front of the window; my voice can easily reach the altar, while I keep my eyes fixed on the court.

Every noise agitates me, the least movement makes me tremble. I hear footsteps! "Are they his?" Some

one knocks! "Have they come to look for me?"—
And so for everything.

However, I do not think he can be here before noon. That hour is the epoch of the day. It is the middle, and, though we can not see the sun, we know that it turns in its course at that time.

Also for me there would be an analogy—my early morning is finished, the full day is about to open.

Everything is ready! I have put on my most becoming dress, and in my hair and at my belt I have put two little branches of green—the color of hope, the only thing that the cold has not killed in the park or in my heart! Without saying anything, I persuaded Benoite to make her breakfast a little better, so that I could invite a guest without embarrassment. And now I am waiting. . . .

As in the song we used to sing in the convent,

"Midday is past," and nothing has happened.
I am still waiting at the window,
The coming night makes me sad.

However, in the twilight I can still see a long distance, and I watch without ceasing. How long the luncheon seemed to me! In spite of myself, I could not keep my eyes from the window, though there was no need for such haste—since I am still alone. Doubtless my saint prefers the evening shadows, and is waiting for the darkness to hide his face when he brings me my happiness.

He has until midnight; it is his right, and I prepare

to watch. A huge log on the fire, my arm-chair near the window, and before the altar the last candle that remains to me, a very little one! But to reach to heaven, not even that is needed, I think; and as for my traveler—it is enough to make a red point in the darkness of the night, and my saint, if he chooses, can easily make it shine like a star.

March 20th.

I am sad, I am cold, and even in my bed I can not get warm after my long, cold watch.

It is late—midnight. I never before watched so late, and at this hour, in this perfect calm and quiet, one feels one's self so small, so insignificant!

Outside, the moon had risen over the great stretch of whiteness, and made long lines of silver light. The distant pine-trees seemed to have their branches fringed with crystal. But the hours were so long! As the time approached, my heart beat faster, and it seemed to me as if it were something outside of me which made all this noise. Then, at the first of the twelve strokes, everything stopped. "Now or never!" I thought, and I waited until the clock had finished striking, with my hands closely pressed over my eyes, waiting until it was over, to look. But after, as before, the court was empty, the bell silent, and the road without the least sign of life!

At the same time my taper went out, with a little spluttering. It was burned out, I suppose, but, all the same, it seemed as if the image blew it out to show me that everything was over. It was dismal. The heart,

however, is so made that in spite of myself I took back my "never" of a little while ago. It is not for now, it is true, but to-morrow will come, and one does not haggle with a saint for a fixed hour or minute, as if it were an ordinary bargain.

Perhaps he prefers that nine days should be completely finished, and to give the reward the next day. One can really give credit for twenty-four hours.

So reflecting, I went to sleep, calmly, if without joy, and here I am again looking out.

And now, how will to-day end?

March 23d.

How it ended? O Heavens! who could have foreseen such a thing, and who could have thought that by a foolish imprudence I should nearly cause the death of a man?

How it happened I can hardly remember now, but the waiting without result made me nervous, I think.

The hours that passed bringing me nothing were horribly long, and my hopes, as they left me, made me heart-sick.

The more passionately I had believed, the more bitter was the disillusion, and little by little an intense anger and resentment seized me.

It was all a deception!

Had I not prayed with all my heart? Then why were the promises not fulfilled?

I asked this aloud, begging and praying before my statue, and afterward getting angry and abusing it.

But, of course, my reproaches had no more effect

than my prayers. Only, in speaking, I excited myself, and I was angry at the silence of the metal, as if I could expect anything else.

Since I told my saint all my troubles, and promised him all that my imagination and my heart could suggest, why did he remain silent?

When people are alone on the earth, with no one to listen to them, if they pray to heaven and no one listens to them there, what can they do?

And between each word I stopped, I waited, I gave him time—and always the same silence, and nothing happened.

Then suddenly, revolted, exasperated, in such a passion of anger as I had never known, and feeling that I had the right to revenge myself, I seized the statue, and with all my strength hurled it through the window into the road, crying out :

“You have deceived me. Go !”

The glass that it had broken in its passage fell on the floor just as I heard a cry below.

It was a man, and his face was covered with blood. My Saint Joseph had made a hole in his forehead above his left eye, and, as he fell back from the force of the blow, his feet had caught in the stones fallen from the wall, and his knee was broken.

These last three nights Benoitte and I have watched him, and as I sit waiting by his bed the tears fall.

March 24th.

The doctor has been here, and the knee has been put in splints; but the man's head is not clear yet, which is a bad sign, it seems.

We put ice on his head; there is plenty of that here at least; and as the doctor left just now, he said, tapping me on the shoulder:

"If he does not get well, it will not be your fault, little nurse. Have good courage."

Good courage, when I see his bandages and listen to his delirium! However, I am glad to do all I can, and I am all the time trying to think of something more I can do for him.

But what difficulties with my aunt! what cries and scenes at the beginning! At the moment when Benoitte and I, putting out all our strength, had succeeded

in carrying the heavy weight into the kitchen, she entered by another door.

"What is that?" she cried to me, throwing up her arms.

"A wounded man, aunt."

And as I spoke, we laid him down

provisionally on a blanket spread before the hearth.



"A wounded man? What do you expect me to do with a wounded man? Where did you find him?"

And as she multiplied her questions, Benoite answered her, without ceasing her task:

"Mademoiselle struck him on the head, throwing something out of the window."

"But who is he? What does he say? What does he want?"

"He wants to be let alone, and something to stop the blood," I could not help answering, shrugging my shoulders.

"I will not have him—you know I will not have him!" she replied, moving away. "I do not receive men here."

"I do not offer him to you," I replied, more firmly; "it is my affair."

"And what will you do with him?"

"I shall take care of him, of course."

"Where, and with whom? Alone, night and day?"

"With my nurse, and I will give him my room."

"You are a fool!" she said, violently, turning her back; "I can hinder that."

"How? By putting him out, and leaving him to die in the darkness?"

"Nonsense!" she replied. "These are big words; one does not die of such a trifle. In less than an hour you will see that the man himself will wish to go away, and he will certainly not understand your lamentations."

"You may be sure I shall not force him to stay."

"And if he remains as he is, what do you expect to do?"

"I have told you already," I replied, completely losing patience, and raising my handkerchief that I was holding against the wound; "I intend to cure the wound that you see there, and when it is healed, and he is ready to go away, as you said, I intend to beg him with all my might to pardon me the evil I have done him. Do you understand?"

And not wishing to hear anything more, or to add anything to this odious discussion, which I was afraid might reach the ears of the wounded man, I sent Benoite to prepare what was necessary, while I remained on my knees by his side, moistening his forehead with water, and waiting with the greatest anxiety the first sign of life.

But his lips remained closed and white, and the little stream of blood continued to trickle down on the white wool, making a rapidly increasing spot.

My aunt walked up and down on the other side of the room like a caged lioness, murmuring incessantly the same things. Gradually the fear grew on me that the closed eyes would never open, and that I was bending over the forehead of a dead man, on which the mark of my hand would remain forever.

Then all at once I saw Benoite run past and from the door-step call loudly to some one to stop; and a second after the doctor entered with her.

Certainly, Providence sent him by our little road; and my nurse, who had seen him from the window, had

been able to stop him in time. An hour later, they had together installed the poor man in his bed, dressed his wounded head, and brought back, if not his intelligence, at least his respiration, which was now easy and regular.

With the authority which a stranger and a physician alone could exercise over my aunt, the doctor, indignant at her talk, made her go out at once. When he took his leave she was still in the hall beside me, complaining and repeating her refusal to take care of the wounded man. As soon as she saw the doctor she exclaimed :

“ You know, doctor, this is not my affair ; I will have nothing to do with it ! ”

“ Quite right, madame,” he replied brusquely ; “ young hands are more gentle and lighter for dressing wounds, and a fresh young face is good for the sight of a sick person.”

It is three days since then. If the fever is a little less, his ideas are always wandering.

The name that he pronounces oftenest is that of a certain Jacques, and he makes the most extraordinary discourses to him, with such queer words that, in spite of myself, I laugh and cry at the same time. Then he repeats the only phrase which he has uttered since he fell. At the moment when Benoitte and I ran out, he was lying on the ground, but not quite unconscious, and as I reached him, crying out, “ Good heavens, sir, what has happened ? ” he raised himself on one knee, and with something of a smile, if a man can smile in such a state—

“ Ah ! ah ! ” he said, “ it is the Brahman ! ”

Then he fell, and we carried him in. His Brahman

has come back occasionally since then, and I can not understand what he means by it.

We know nothing at all as to who or what he is. The doctor has inquired at the village inns ; no traveler answering to his description had been seen, and it looks as if he sprang out of the earth into our unlucky road.

His clothes are elegant. He has a short, tight-fitting coat in superb fur ; his hands are white ; and all of his face that the bandage does not cover is handsome.

In his pocket, nothing but a card-case without address, and, for a valise, a small black leather bag, which he carried on his back. I hate the idea of forcing it open, and the doctor consents to wait a few days, hoping that he will be able to answer for himself.

Benoite makes the wildest suppositions.

"He is perhaps a peddler," she said to me just now, looking at the odd shape of his luggage ; "or perhaps a photographer. Some of them have as little with them."

I do not believe that. From his hands, his eyebrows, and his beard, I am sure he may be a duke or a count, and in any case a gentleman, and I try to guess his age and name.

Is he handsome ? I do not think so, and I do not now give a thought. My remorse and my torments occupy me completely, so that I take neither food nor sleep, and the doctor was very angry at finding me still up this morning.

He used his authority to make me go down and walk in the court.

But the air was too much for me ; I felt ill, and went

back to the bedside, determined not to leave it again until the patient's consciousness should return.

If I could hear one sensible word to show that his head is all right, the rest would be nothing.

March 25th.

He has spoken--it is accomplished! and I am so wild with happiness that I should like to cry it aloud.

Last evening, in spite of being sleepy, I insisted on watching, and in order to be more at my ease than in my dresses with tight sleeves and double skirts, which catch upon everything, I had put on, in place of a dressing-gown, the least faded of the old silk dresses that I hunted out last summer in the store-room. In the wide skirt, straight and simple, with the waist which seemed made for me, I felt myself so comfortable that, I hardly know how it happened, very soon I fell asleep in my arm-chair, and so quickly that I made no struggle to keep awake, and remained so, completely forgetting my patient, for perhaps two hours.

Then the dimly burning lamp, the dying fire, and the feeling of cold and sadness that always comes at those hours, woke me, and I ran to look at the clock.

In a few minutes more, the time would arrive for giving him his medicine. I had yet time to make up the fire, for the room was getting cold.

I was on my knees, placing a large stick of wood on the coals, and blowing with my mouth the bits of dry moss, when suddenly I heard a voice speaking to me.

My surprise was so great that I jumped up with a cry of fright, understanding nothing at first.

Then immediately I thought of the wounded man, and ran to the bed. It was really he who called. Resting on his elbow, his uncovered eye wide open, and looking at me with intense curiosity, he seemed more surprised than he would have been if he had found himself suddenly transported to the other world, and, before renewing his question, he waited so long, looking at me from head to foot, that I was going to question him myself, when, anticipating me, he broke in:

"Madame," he said, hesitating, as if to see whether I would protest, "I beg you to tell me where I am."

"In the Château of Erlange de Fond-de-Vieux, sir," I replied, trembling a little.

"Perfectly unknown!" he muttered. "Then you are the châtelaine?" he continued, raising his head.

"Half—yes."

"And, excuse my stupidity, I beg, madame; but, really, I think I have lost my senses—what am I doing here, if you please?"

"Waiting to get well. After your terrible accident we brought you in here, and—"

"Ah! it was an accident," said he; and as I was about to say to him, "I beg you to be sure it was nothing else," he continued, always with the same calm manner:

"Will you oblige me, madame, still further by telling me in what year we are?"

If I had not seen the perfect calm of his face, I



“In 1885, sir.”

should have supposed that he was again delirious, but he spoke with perfect self-possession, and I replied mechanically :

“ In 1885, sir.”

“ Really ! ” said he in a low voice, as if speaking to himself ; “ I should not have thought it was the fashion.” Then, without transition : “ Will it be possible for you to give me pen and paper, in order that I may write to a friend who must be very anxious about me ? ”

“ M. Jacques ? ” I asked, in spite of myself.

“ Precisely,” he replied. “ Has he then been here, madame ? ”

“ No, but in your delirium—”

“ Ah ! I have been delirious,” said he. “ Hum ! have I spoken for young ears ? ”

And as I shook my head without reflection—

“ Yes ? Very well, so much the better. Frenzy has then more good sense than reason. And you will be so kind, madame, as to give me—”

“ All you want to-morrow. It is night now, and one does not write at night.”

“ Why,” he asked, “ when one has lamps ? ” And he smiled to himself at what he said, like a child.

“ Because the doctor orders the most complete calm and repose for you, and he would never forgive me for having permitted it,” I replied.

His eyebrows contracted like those of a person unused to resistance, and he thrust out his arm so quickly that, in spite of myself, I stepped back. He smiled again then, and, inclining his head—

"Do not be afraid, and excuse me for keeping you standing. In truth, a sick man is a poor cavalier." And with his finger he pointed to an arm-chair.

For my part I was confounded. This man awaking from delirium among strangers, suffering very much, who spoke tranquilly on each subject, in this half-sarcastic manner, without inquiring what the accident was which had thrown him into this bed—he resembled nothing that I had ever imagined.

Without sitting down, I had placed my hand on the back of the chair, and stood there before this remarkable person, speechless and in a maze. Then the half-hour struck, and I remembered his medicine.

"You must drink this," I said, taking the glass already prepared from the table.

But he drew back with a decided gesture of refusal, and I repeated anxiously, in a suppliant tone :

"I beg you ; it is to make you sleep."

"I know it very well," he muttered between his teeth ; "it is in the piece !" He drank it without another word ; then added, as Benoîte, whom I had forced to rest a little on her bed, entered softly—"And here is old François."

He placed his head on the pillow, murmuring "Thanks," and ten minutes after he was asleep, until the doctor came, who is with him now.

The doctor is satisfied, or partially so ; in any case, there is no danger now of congestion.

On the other hand, the disposition of our singular

patient surprises him as much as it did me, and just now, in leaving him, he wiped his forehead and exclaimed:

"What a willful man! My poor child, why did he not stay in his stupor a month longer? We shall have hard work to manage him now. He wanted nothing less than to get up and travel."

It seems that as soon as the doctor entered, this morning, he half sat up in bed, paying no more attention to his splintered leg than if it did not exist, and began to thank him briefly and courteously for the attention he had given him.

"It is hardly weather in which one ought to give the faculty the trouble of going about the country roads," he said, "and I beg you to accept my apologies."

Then he began a series of questions like those he had addressed to me in the night, which proves that my answers did not seem very clear to him, and asking them all so rapidly that the doctor declares they took his breath away.

Once reassured about his geographical position, which evidently seemed doubtful to him, he eagerly sought to learn exactly what was the matter with him.

"I feel something like a great ball there," he said to me, pointing to his knee; "what is it? I suppose you have not cut off my leg without telling me? And here—have I been trepanned, that I have my head in bandages?"

The doctor reassured him as best he could, but he is not one of those patients who is deceived by words.

He questioned closely why and how the thing happened, and required to have described to him all the bones and ligaments injured. After which he asked for a mirror, and the doctor handed him one from his case.

"This is a pretty business!" he grumbled. "To destroy what there is best in my face. But, bah! a tile fell on the head of the great Pyrrhus: why should I not perish by the neck of a bottle?"

"There is no question of perishing," the doctor replied.

"I certainly hope not," he answered. "I am still a little feeble this morning, but in less than a week I shall have delivered my hostess from the inconvenient charge of a sick stranger. Tell her so, doctor, I beg you."



And as the doctor bowed his head without answering, with a gesture that clearly signified, "Go on, my friend—I do not wish to contradict you, but you are talking very foolishly," the young man perceived that this manner of assent was only a way

of calming a feverish person, and that there was probably a very different idea behind those large white eyebrows.

He began then to question the doctor imperiously, to make him name the day and hour when he would be cured, insisting that the truth should be told to a

person of his age, so that the doctor ended by fixing as a first date a month, reserving to himself the right of adding another to it in case of need.

At this he became furious.

"A month! doctor," he cried—"a month! You want to keep me here a month! You can not be serious. I beg you to believe that I have planned quite other employment for my spring than watching my bones knit. And it can go on quite as well somewhere else as here, I imagine. A month! Why, in a month I shall be sleeping on a macaw mat, with six slaves to fan me, and the sky of India above my head."

"Then you will have found a very fast vessel, my dear sir," said the doctor, laughing. "But let us reason a little. You are not particularly anxious, I suppose, to be lame all your life simply for want of a few days' care?"

"Certainly not, for I make more use of my feet than most men; but, with my leg in this box, what does it matter whether I sleep in a bed or a carriage? it will be kept motionless all the same."

"Perhaps so, if you travel on clouds."

"Even without that," he resumed with vivacity. "There are the sleeping-cars. No matter how wild your mountains are, I can certainly find twelve men who will carry me to the nearest station. There are railroads all the way to the sea; once there, without a movement, on a lighter and an inclined plane such as are used for heavy freight, I can get on board, where I shall have all the time my bones need to mend."

"Is it for an important affair?" the doctor asked.

"Simply for my own pleasure, and because I wish it."

On this, without a word, the doctor put on his hat and took his overcoat from the chair where it was drying before the fire; but when the sick man saw him ready to leave he became so violently agitated that the good doctor approached the bed.

"I should like very much to know who is going to keep me from doing what I like," said the stranger, growing still more agitated.

"On my word, my dear sir, I am," replied the doctor, putting down his hat and reseating himself quietly. "Let us understand each other once for all, and, as you like plain dealing, let us have it.

"First, let me tell you that your knee, and you yourself, might have been of no consequence to me, and I beg you to believe that, had the circumstances been different, if you did not care that your broken bones should knit, I should leave you to fall to pieces with the best grace in the world. But at present I am your physician, and that changes the case completely. Have you been a soldier, my dear sir? I do not know, but it is probable; in any case, you know what the army is and what makes its force—I mean obedience to orders. A soldier is placed at a post, with orders to let no one pass. Why? Wherefore? In whose name? He knows nothing at all; but in the name of this order he will lower his bayonet against friend or foe.

"With us it is much the same case. I see you on a road, I do not know you, you are nothing to me, and I would not put the least obstacle in your way. But a fall, a wound, something knocks you down, and you belong to me; I return and pick you up, and carry you off, and I must answer for you as the soldier does the door that he guards. Try to pass this door, and I lower my pike, I warn you!"

"Doctor," the young man replied at once, stretching out his hand, "pardon me, and rest assured that I consider myself a prisoner on parole. You must not excuse me by thinking that illness makes me ill-tempered, for I am always just as you see me; but I confess that, obstinate as I am, if I am struck hard and in the right place, I yield."

"When one is warned, it is sufficient," replied the good doctor. And he left his troublesome patient, with the desired writing materials.

In the mean time, the passport of our stranger has told us approximately who he is.

His name is Count Pierre de Civreuse, and, as nearly as one can judge at first sight, the doctor tells me, his profession is to do foolish things. He is a gentleman—the doctor agrees—and evidently of an uncommon character.

The doctor then told him my aunt's name and mine, so we are introduced to each other; but the doctor said nothing yet about the real cause of the accident, being apprehensive on account of the irritability of our patient, and this is an immense relief to me. This

stranger frightens me more and more, and I do not see how I can endure any explanation with him.

Benoite, who has been arranging his room, tells me that he is still writing, and I will leave him in peace with his friend Jacques, though I am anxious to know how this will end, and how I can ever tell him the truth, and obtain the pardon of such an unmanageable person.



Pierre de Civreuse to Jacques de Colonges.

You have thought me dead, my good fellow, have you not?—and I can tell you that for some days I thought so too.

For I do not know how many hours I was buried, I do not know where. Doubtless, where all unconscious souls go; and it seemed to me so far underground and so heavy that, with my little remaining resolution, I kept trying to force open the planks of my coffin with my shoulder. Certainly, at that distance, one has taken half of the final journey, and reached the place where the smallest grain of weight will turn the balance.

Happily for me, I have swung over to the good side, humanly speaking, you understand, and I woke up one fine evening rather bruised by my fall; but one does not fall such a distance without perceiving the effect, espe-

cially when one's knee is well packed in a pine-wood box, and one's head in bandages.

Midnight was striking on a clock, the favorite hour for those who come back from beyond the grave, and that was the first material thing of which I became conscious.

If I have not completely forgotten what happens in the world, I said to myself, these little machines never strike more than twelve times; if this one does not exceed the number, it proves that I am on the earth, and quite alive.

And it did not; and, sure of my identity, I opened my eyes to look about me.

My friend, do you know "*La Fée*" of Octave Feuillet—a charming little piece which is often played—and have you seen it? Well, that evening—it was yesterday, I think—I woke up in the first act of "*La Fée*," and I made the responses to Mademoiselle d'Athol in person, during one or two acts. Do not imagine that I am joking—listen.

The first thing that a sick man thinks of examining is his bed. Mine had twisted columns hung with Louis XIII or Louis XIV tapestry—I will not swear which—and a spread in silk, which we will call curtain, if you are willing. The room in which I lay was very large, dimly lighted by two yellowish candles placed in huge candlesticks; it was paneled with carved oak, and one guessed, rather than saw, high, high up, the beams of the ceiling, picked out with a narrow band of gold which shone from place to place.

Against the wall stood stiff sofas, which made my back ache only to look at; there was a collection of *prie-dieu* all alike, arranged in a row, as if for matins; and the floor was without the shadow of a carpet.

Finally, before the chimney, in an arm-chair—you guessed that I was keeping this chair for the end, did you not?—a little lady, slight, elegant, and blonde, was sleeping quite erect in a dress of pink satin, with a long, pointed waist. Her dress was at least two hundred years old; her face, eighteen—how to make them agree? I worked at this problem so long that the little lady awoke suddenly, without preliminary movements.

She threw a glance toward my bed, like a pupil caught in a fault; in the shadow I seemed to be sleeping soundly, I think, and, reassured on this point, like a faithful vestal she gave her attention to the fire.

She bends down, arranges the coals, blows with all her might, scattering the ashes in her hair; then with her hands she takes a great log, the fourth of a moderate-sized oak, and places it promptly on the hearth.

She moves, she lives, so that the idea of a châtelaine of ancient days petrified in her nest by some enchantment leaves me, and it is at this moment that I see myself in the château in Brittany, where Jeanne Athol is preparing her pious subterfuges, and converting the skeptical De Comminges solely by the charm of her grandmother's dress and her old-fashioned speech. Only, this time she had forgotten her powder, and the color of her hair destroyed the illusion. I call her as gently as I can; she jumps up, crying out. Evidently my

awakening was not in the programme, and she is much startled. However, she approaches, and we converse a moment, going from blunder to blunder, she willfully misleading me; I showing clearly that I understand the part she is playing. At last she gets rid of me, in the usual way, with a narcotic, which sends me to sleep; not too quickly, however, for me to see the third person, an old duenna, wrinkled like a last year's apple, with small bright eyes, which seem to look through you, and who will play perfectly the part of old François; then the curtain falls, and I wake up the next morning, still among the same surroundings, but beside me is a witty and capricious doctor, who in two words explains my case to me, and who, when I try to revolt, reduces me to order so quickly that I am still a little stupefied by it.

If you wish to know the whole truth, my friend, my head is cut open and my leg broken. Would you have believed that these were such fragile things? I should not, and I touch myself now with the greatest tenderness and respect.

Is it conceivable that between the fibula and tibia such a violent disagreement can be produced? Splinters in one place, broken bones in another, and in the midst of it all a knee-pan out of place, like a compass that has lost the north and can not get back to it. As to my skull, it is the sinus frontalis which is injured, but I am promised that in a few days it will be solidly mended.

On the whole I joke, but I am furious as I know how to be in my best moments, and the thought of the task which will keep you at your uncle's some months adds

not a little to my annoyance. Weeks of immobility, without you to keep me company! Can you imagine me, with my little lady in pink as sole resource, under six feet of snow? For I forgot to tell you that, like the wheat sown in autumn, we are really under the snow; it is only necessary for us to germinate, and, to come here to take care of me, my doctor has to wear alternately seven-league boots and Norwegian skates.

Now, as to the cause, I hear you asking, and what the devil are you doing in such a place?

Here is the reason: You may remember that I intended, before going to the country of the sun, to come and freeze myself and see a real winter—as gourmands prepare for a good dinner by fasting and open-air exercise.

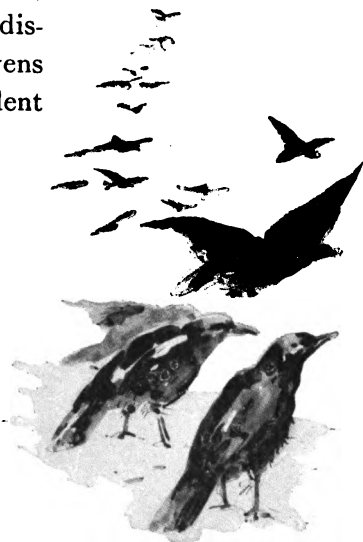
For this purpose I stopped at a little village whose name you would not recognize, for you do not know it any more than I knew it yesterday, and, carrying a kind of haversack, I went off on foot among the mountains.

I made inquiries about my route, to this extent that I knew that if I walked straight ahead I ought to come to an elevation, whence I should have a superb view—a pine-forest, a vista opening on a valley, and even a château.

At the end of five hundred yards I was in complete solitude, and, if you have never happened to wander about the country at this season of the year, you can not imagine how much more complete this solitude is than any other. Wherever one places his foot, there are no other foot-prints, there is no sound of animals—every-

where a brilliant uniformity, which is admirable during the first half-hour, fatiguing during the second, and enervating and blinding during the third.

No more inequalities of ground, no more hollows or hillocks; everything is level, a republican equality. At distant intervals a band of ravens swoop down with the insolent cries of the last survivors. It is their hour, and they know it. There are snow on the bushes and tears of clear frost. The dew is three months old, and will last several weeks longer before it evaporates; and a frightful north wind seems to cut one's face to pieces.



However, the longest road has an end, and I found successively the vista of the valley, the forest, and the fine view promised, when the château itself appeared to me. I spare you its description, having seen it myself very imperfectly, as you will soon perceive.

One of the wings opens on the road. It was before this one that I stopped, and innocently occupied myself in brushing the snow off a large stone, so as to sit down and look about me at my leisure, impressed as I was by the savage melancholy of the place.

A singular curiosity seized me. It seemed to me that behind these walls something original and unexpected must be concealed, and I was suddenly stung by a strong desire to penetrate them. You will remember, besides, that anything concealed and inaccessible has always tempted me, and I can not remember, as a boy, ever to have stolen an apple off the lower branches. Of the high ones I will not say as much.

At the same time, the remembrance of our last conversation came back to me. Do you remember the evening when we were talking together of my journey, and you were preaching prudence to me? "Once in India," I told you, "I mean to see everything, especially the things which are concealed from European eyes. I mean to get into the family life and all the private rites and ceremonies, to know the habits that are curious or ignoble, and to learn all the mysteries of their worship, even if I have to assume twenty disguises to arrive at the feet of Brahma and adore him unveiled and according to the rites." And you—you replied prudently: "Beware! every man is jealous of his secret and the inviolability of his fireside, but the Oriental more than any other, and, for the pleasure of walking where no other man has trod, you risk some great misfortune."

"From whom?" I asked you, laughing. "Do you think the god will disturb himself for me; and shall I have the pleasure of seeing him put his eighteen legs in motion to get down from his pedestal?"

"Not the god, perhaps, but one of his worshipers

without compunction ; and if you penetrate the sacred inclosure you may very possibly meet some Brahman who will not hesitate to take strong measures to force you to respect the consecrated limits."

Why was I thinking of all this at that moment? Was it because I wondered if the susceptibility of Frenchmen would be as quickly aroused as that of Indians? or that unconsciously I was measuring with my eye the height of the walls and looking for a projection on which to place my foot? I can not say ; but just at this instant a great noise of broken glass made me raise my head, and, before I could speak, a projectile whose nature I do not know was thrown at me by a sure hand, striking me full in the forehead. The blow was so violent that it made me stagger, and, catching my feet among the stones, I fell on one knee with my whole weight, without being able to save myself, and so awkwardly that the wounds I have told you of are the result.

Could one's indiscretion be more promptly punished, or the results you foresaw have been more quickly attained, than this crushing of my curiosity in the bud, and this finding your Brahman at the third degree of longitude?

Some one ran out frightened, with confused exclamations ; but I would have sworn that a thick fog had suddenly risen from the ground, for I distinguished nothing more, and must have lost consciousness at once.

I have no remembrance of the first attentions that

were given to me, and my sleep in the other world lasted, it appears, four whole days.

As to the author of my wound and the instrument of my punishment, all around me express themselves so vaguely that I am reduced to drawing my own conclusions; but when I see my little pink lady, or even the old woman with the bright eyes, I intend to find out.

In the mean while I have learned the name of the manor: it is the château of Erlange de Fond-de-Vieux, and you can direct your letters to me here.

The postman comes up here from time to time—always, in fact, when the package of letters for the neighboring village seems to him large enough, or when he is intrusted by the butcher or grocer with some commission which seems to him worth the trouble.

It is inhabited by only two women—Mademoiselle d'Epine and Mademoiselle d'Erlange—who are aunt and niece; and when I hinted to the doctor that I might be an embarrassment to them in more than one way, he denied it with so much good nature, that I could only put my scruples aside, and accept their hospitality.

By-the-way, did I tell you that the doctor speaks of a month without moving, which in the mouth of a doctor means double that, and that he insists that I shall lie flat on my back?

This idea made me furious, and when I think that, for a platonic contemplation of a wall—a contemplation which lasted in all ten minutes, and which was, after all, perfectly harmless—I have to pass weeks with no society

but two women, when I might be hunting tigers in the jungle, I am ready to lose all my remaining calmness !

"But since you are in the place that you were so ready to enter, of what do you complain?" you will say.

Exactly, my dear friend, it is because I am here that I now want to go out ; I have seen all there is to see, and there is not enough to divert an octogenarian.

But hush, Jacques ! Some one is knocking at the door, and it is a gentle tap, that can only come from delicate fingers. Get down behind the bed, my friend—be sure that I will tell you all about it presently.

March 25th.

After the doctor left yesterday, I waited a long time before going back to the room of Monsieur de Civreuse, wishing to leave him free to write to his friend, and finally I did not know how to manage about going in. To knock and go in and sit down in my usual place, would be to force him to talk to me ; and, on the other hand, I could not leave him entirely alone, as he might want something.

I would have sent Benoîte ; but my aunt, who pretends to be unconscious of the presence of the wounded man, has given her all sorts of extra work these last few days, and keeps her in her room under the pretext of having the curtains beaten.

At last I had an idea, and, calling my dog, I made him understand gently what I expected of him, and where he was to carry the paper that I attached to his

collar. Then I knocked softly at the door, and drew back to let him in.

On the paper I had written: "Monsieur de Civreuse is begged to say whether he wishes to stay alone, or if he needs anything. The dog will bring back the answer, or will wait for it as long as is desired; it is only necessary to say to him, 'Go.'"

After a few moments I heard "One" scratching at the door, and in his collar was my note, on the back of which was written: "Monsieur de Civreuse hardly dares confess he is dying of hunger and thirst, and that in jumping up just now to hold up his neck the faithful messenger knocked over the table with the ink-stand. He is full of regret at being unable to pick them up himself."

I went in at once, and quickly righted the table and wiped up the ink as well as I could, while Monsieur de Civreuse said interrogatively: "Mademoiselle d'Epine? Mademoiselle d'Erlange?" "Mlle. d'Erlange," I answered quickly, not in the least pleased at the confusion.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "there are aunts of all ages." Then, as I rubbed the floor with my foot, he began to excuse himself for the harm he had done, but I reassured him at once, telling him I did not mind a spot in the least, if it is not on me—which is the simple truth.

I asked him if he wanted any particular thing to eat, but warned him that the larder of Erlange is rustic; and he replied that, as he was preparing to undertake a journey in countries where he might not be able to find food

every day, he should be only too happy to dine regularly, no matter on what.

I succeeded in getting Benoite away from my aunt for a quarter of an hour to bring some food, and when she was gone I finished helping him—pouring out the wine, cutting the bread, etc. While he was eating, which he did with a good appetite, Monsieur de Civreuse asked me several questions in his cold and indifferent tone, which not only frightens me, but makes me answer all wrong, I suppose, for he looks at me, from time to time, as if I had said the most stupid thing in the world. After a little while I began to make his coffee.

Benoite had left the coffee, and water boiling on the coal, and had instructed me what to do ; but, alas ! it is such a new business for me, that when I was ready to begin I could not remember a word of what she had told me, and I was on my knees before the fire, the kettle in one hand and the coffee in the other, in terrible perplexity.

I knew very well that I had to put one in the other, but which must I begin with, and how was I to mix them ?

To pour the water into the wooden box seemed to me queer ; it occurred to me that perhaps I ought to pour the coffee into the kettle. If I went to ask Benoite, I should have to endure an hour of cries and reproaches from my aunt ; and, on the other hand, Monsieur de Civreuse from his bed watched me with his eye with a quiet curiosity that exasperated me. I decided suddenly, and emptied the box of coffee into the water, and put

the whole on the fire, and allowed it to boil a moment.

"Will you allow me to help you?" I asked as I approached him.

"With pleasure," he replied calmly, holding out his cup.

Alas! it was like mud—black, thick, and horrible-looking, and settled in the bottom of the cup in a most untempting manner.

I stopped, very much embarrassed, exclaiming:

"It is not right; I must have made a mistake, but I do not know how to make coffee."

"Nor I either," Monsieur Pierre replied, still holding his cup; "only, I think they generally make use of that," and he pointed with his finger to the coffee-pot, which Benoitte had placed on the table, and which I had quite forgotten; and when I asked him quickly why he had not told me, he replied:

"I thought you were making it in the Turkish fashion."

Finally, I strained a cupful for him through a square of muslin, and he drank it all up without a word.



"So you have resumed your true form," he said, as I took my usual place in my arm-chair.

"My true form? But I am always like this."

"Not last night."

"Oh! because I had put on that old-fashioned dress! The fact is, I must have looked strange, and I wonder what you thought when you saw me."

"I thought I had had the good fortune to find a place where Time had stopped his clock, and had not wound it up for two hundred years."

"Why the good fortune?"

"Because I know nothing so inane as the present age," he said.

"I could tell you something more inane still," I replied quickly. "It is not to know the present age at all, and that is my case."

"Do not alarm yourself; you resemble it much more than you suppose," said he. Then, thinking that, after all, the phrase was not very polite, he went on hastily, before I could say a word:

"And your dog, mademoiselle. Why have you left him outside? Not on my account, I hope."

"I was afraid he might tire you," and, as he shook his head, I ran to open the door, and that foolish "One" came in with a bound, rolling over on my feet, resting his nose on my knees, and nearly knocking me over in the ardor of his caresses.

Monsieur de Civreuse watched him without a word, and when I kneeled down in front of him to put his paws around my neck—

"You love him very much?" he asked.

"Infinitely," I replied, fervently. "My poor old nurse first, and him next: those are my two best friends."

"And the aunt comes third?" he said in a low voice, more to himself than to me, I think. I muttered in the same tone:

"Not even that." But he did not hear, I suppose; and I got up to clear off the table.

After a moment he asked me what time it was, and when I had told him, I could not help adding:

"I am afraid that the days will seem very long to you, and that you will be much bored in a little while."

"Oh, it is not of myself that I think; it was for you that I am anxious. What a load, what a responsibility, to have a helpless stranger suddenly thrust on your hands, and what a great deal of trouble it will give you!"

He was beginning a long phrase of thanks, when I interrupted him quickly:

"Do not think that; it is exactly the contrary. I am so glad! it amuses me very much."

I thought of my solitude in speaking thus, and the delight of leading a busy life for at least two months; but he took it in another sense, I suppose, for, shutting his lips, and inclining his head ceremoniously, he continued:

"Ah! so much the better; misfortune has its compensations, and I am delighted that some one benefits by my accident."

Benoîte came in just then, and I took the opportunity to slip out, for I did not know what to say.

On the whole, this gentleman does not please me at all, and if it were not for the passionate desire I have to obtain his pardon, and to make him gradually forget my deplorable violence, I would take an immense dislike to him immediately, and show it to him pretty clearly.

His imperturbable calm seems to me like a bridle to check my vivacity—as if it were his business! and his mocking eye, which watches all I do, gives me a wild desire to be impertinent. Once his bandage off, and two eyes watching me, it will be unbearable; I seem to feel them on me now, through the door.

Pierre to Jacques.

My friend, I have learned the whole truth, for I manœuvred so skillfully during a *tête-à-tête* that I had by chance with Benoîte, the faithful guardian of Mlle. d'Er-lange, that I made her tell me all that the doctor thought best to conceal.

To begin, I left you, I think, watching behind the curtain for the entrance of my blonde fairy of last night, and curious to see her by day.

Well, my friend, you may believe me or not, as you like, but the magic went on, and she came this time under the familiar and pleasing form of a huge, curly Newfoundland dog.

The intelligent animal marched directly to my bed,

and, raising himself on his hind-legs with the grace of the elephants in the hippodrome, bent his head to show me a little white paper attached to his collar: "And then the beautiful princess dispatched him, a messenger under the form of a hippogriff with three heads, who should, with many details, declare to him her will."

The "will" in this case was drawn up in simple style, and in substance was as follows: "What does Monsieur de Civreuse need most?" The writing was as irregular as the branches of a willow-tree in a high wind, wandering all over the little square of paper, and the last words, being crowded, literally were piled one on top of the other.

Instantly I augured ill of its author. A woman need not write at all, but if she does, it should be well done, so that the traces of her pen should not be like the fantastic wanderings of a beetle. It is a prejudice I have, and affects me in the same way as if I should see a marquise draw out of her pocket a coarse, cotton handkerchief, or use patchouly as a perfume.

But, as it was hardly the time for philosophical reflections, and the dog, with his neck stretched out, was still waiting for his answer, I resolved to confess frankly that I was hungry, and that my strongest wish at that moment was to have something to eat. This was not sentimental—far from it; but to a woman who does not know how to write! Then, as I bent down to tie the ribbon to the collar, the dog made a movement, and, with the touch of his shoulder, threw the table, ink-stand, and all the rest on the floor. Rather abashed, I

added a postscript to announce the misfortune, and a minute after my young guardian of last night entered.

She was dressed this time like everybody else, and, with her hair coiled high, she resembled in such a ridiculous way all other women, that she made me think of a portrait by Velasquez, that had been restored by replacing a child's head with that of an honest Burgundian peasant-woman. Is it possible to have under one's hand so much local coloring and not to make use of it?

Quite indifferent to the effect she produced on me, she repaired the disorder without speaking. She picked up the table, wiped the ink, and rubbed her cloth over the floor with the point of her foot.

I tried at first to excuse myself very humbly, but at the first word she stopped me, saying: "Oh, do not worry; I do not mind spots in the least!" so I let her alone. After that she went to see about food, and I was left to my thoughts.

My dear fellow, this young girl already displeases me very decidedly. Her appearance is of a piece with her writing, and this last phrase decided me. To me, also, spots are nothing, and I have seen rivulets of ink spilled, looking calmly on; but from her the words shocked me.

The thing that I dislike above all is to find in another, especially in a woman, my own defects. I know my own face, and, if I want to see it, I have only to look in the glass; and I do not wish to see other faces that are the same. I should like to change its ugliness,

and my huge nose appears to better advantage beside small ones than in the vicinity of those that are like it.

On her return, she began serving the meal which the old servant had brought, moving about with a vivacity full of good intentions, but with such awkwardness, that, after the first few minutes, I dared not even ask for bread. She just escaped cutting off the end of her thumb with the slice, the dishes rattled under her fingers, and you have never seen anything less feminine than this young girl.

"Timidity," you will say—"it was your green eyes which disturbed her." Do you think so? Was it my fault also about the coffee, which I took from her hands and drank to the last drop?

Ah! my friend, every man has his bitter cup, which he must drain in this world, without speaking of those which purgatory has in store for him. I know it, and I am resigned; but mine was intolerably bitter that day!

From my bed I watched Mademoiselle d'Erlange squatting down before the hearth, preparing the mixture with the confidence of knowledge, and, though it seemed to me hardly as it ought to be, my own inexperience kept me from making remarks, at least until I should have tasted it. But then!

Have you any remembrance of cream that has turned, when you were a child, which made you weep with disappointment? And can you still see something thick and cloudy, with little specks of unknown origin swimming about in it and multiplying? My poor Jacques, it was a thing like that which was offered to

me. I confess I was vexed, and the perfume of the mocha, which passed under my nose in the form of smoke, made me scowl.

I can hear you pitying the culprit and abusing me for my bad humor. Oh, my dear fellow, you can keep your pity; her embarrassment was not great, I assure you, and I even believe that, if she had had the slightest encouragement, she would have laughed outright.

But, in reality, I did not find it in the least funny; I did not move, and, possessed with the idea of making it all right, she imagined an expedient which pleased her so much that she communicated it to me with an exclamation of pleasure. She ran to a wardrobe, pulled out a pocket-handkerchief, and strained me a cup of her horrible mixture in a corner of the muslin, which she held up delicately. I acknowledge it was clean, but you must confess that this strainer was of a doubtful character, and not exactly fitted to calm my susceptibilities.

I drank it! What would you have done? But the bitter taste, with an after-flavor of lavender and verbena, or what not, taken from the cambric, was atrocious!

Then, with the pleasing sentiment of duty done, she placed herself in her huge arm-chair, her head reaching hardly half-way up the back, and I tried to make her talk.

Do you want to hear the number of her attachments, in their order? She makes no mystery about it: her old nurse, her dog, and that is all; for her aunt only comes in as twenty-fifth to fill up—and scarcely that!

As for my accident, she stated her sentiments at

once, without coaxing. It amuses her—oh! it amuses her, do you hear? She has never seen anything funnier than this adventure! There is satisfaction in thinking that it diverts some one, if not me!

Starting from this point, our cordiality did not increase, as you will understand, when the duenna came in very fortunately to relieve our embarrassment. Mademoiselle d'Erlange flew off, and I—who unfortunately could not—I settled myself on my pillows, resolved to hold on to Benoite, as she was there, and not to let her go until I had got out of her old head everything that was in it.

Only, our two wills were on this point diametrically opposed, and she seemed as decided to keep silent as I to make her speak; so that for a good quarter of an hour we played at cross-purposes, she diverging, and I bringing her back to the point, only to see her slip once more out of my fingers, until I conquered the position by a ruse.

My friend, if you still dare to defend the delicate little fingers which handle the porcelain so gently, and which know how to make such delicious coffee, learn that it is their mark that I bear on my forehead, and my antipathy to Mademoiselle d'Erlange was a premonition.

Bad intention, I do not say, but rather too rash an act you will acknowledge, I think, and above all when you know the nature of the missile employed. It is heavy, massive, and a noble metal. Do you guess? Certainly you can not, and if you tried a hundred times you would not be further advanced.

Do you see that image of St. Joseph almost hidden in the corner of my room, as if he wanted to sink into the wall? It is a beautiful thing, well finished, chiseled in solid silver, which I should without hesitation attribute to the Italian school, and which might even be signed Cellini, so exquisite is the work. It is, however, the instrument of my misfortune.

In order that you may understand how it happened, we must go back some days, and you must imagine Mademoiselle d'Erlange so penetrated with the virtues of this saint, believing in him so entirely, so full of a passionate veneration for him, that she passed the best part of each day at his feet!

Then suddenly, without apparent reason, from mortification or fatigue, a difficulty arose between them, and the young suppliant, passing from one feeling to another, became as ardent in resentment as she had been humble in humility, and finally, in an access of impious rage, cast the once revered statuette ignominiously out of doors.

Not to pray to it any more was too little. The old idolaters are not the only ones who like to burn what they have adored; and, besides, as the good Benoite told me, sighing, "The child never uses half-measures."



So far, there is nothing to be said against this way of acting. I do not know the wrongs of the young rebel; it was her right, perhaps, and in every case it was strictly her own affair. But the worst is that, while this little comedy was being acted, in the usual way in this world, it was the innocent who was destined to suffer for the guilty.

You have guessed, my friend: this time the lamb of the fable was to be I, and the hour when my unfortunate reveries of which I have told you led me along that road, was also the one in which Mademoiselle d'Erlange sent the poor saint flying over the country, committing thus the double sin of attempting the life of a fellow-being, and inflicting the most mortifying treatment on an object belonging to the Church.

Without ceremony, and forgetting its sacred and pacific character, it cut open my forehead with the skill of a professional bomb. So this is how, without a crime with which society or the gods can reproach me, I have narrowly escaped death, and am still threatened with a stiff knee—or at least a damaged one—and all because a young person and a silver statuette had a difference to settle!

What do you think now of Mademoiselle d'Erlange? Can you not see the claws under her rosy nails, and will you be quite tranquil about me during the hours when she is alone to watch with me? I am awaiting with more curiosity than I can tell you the explanation which must certainly take place between us on this subject. Will this proud Amazon show confusion? Nothing is more

uncertain, and I am reserving all my decision for the attempt to come out of it with the honors of war.

I am certainly her victim! She must not forget that; and, if she make slight of the thing, I will tear off my bandage like the heroes in the pages of Anne Radcliffe, and show her my gaping wound!

March 29th.

Benoite has spoken. Monsieur Pierre knows all! Heavens! what shall I say, and how shall I dare to see him? I have kept on saying these things to myself since yesterday, without ever finding a solution.

In a certain sense, I am not sorry that he knows. Doubtful situations have always been odious to me, and I remember the time when as a child I asked my aunt to give me "two slaps at once" rather than the punishment she was reserving for me in the evening. Since now I am really to blame, I should not be sorry to know at once what it is to be. But how to present myself, and with what words to begin? I could not think, or, at least, what I had in my head escaped as soon as I approached the fatal door.

Ten times in the afternoon I came so near that I half turned the latch, but each time, seized with fear at the last moment, I fled before I had opened the door. It seemed to me that all my ideas stayed behind in the library, which I have taken for my room lately, for, as soon as I go back there, words crowd upon me, I gesticulate nobly, and the phrases most fit to move a haughty heart

come to my lips. I advance thus to a divan, where I suppose Monsieur de Civreuse to be extended, so as to make the rehearsal realistic, and, seizing the corner of a cushion as I propose to do with his hand—

“Sir,” I say, in a tremulous voice, “pardon me, I beg you! I have committed a foolish act which will cause me remorse forever, and of which I can not think even now without terror. See how unhappy I am, and tell me, I beg you, that you are not too angry with me! Until then I can not pardon myself, and I hate not to be at peace with myself, for the reproaches which I suffer are more bitter than anything you can imagine.”

The cushion draws my hand toward it, kisses courteously the tips of my fingers, and gives me absolution.

Full of my subject I started, but, in going out of the door, my discourse became slightly uncertain; in passing through the hall it was half gone. The rest followed quickly, so that I arrived at the decisive spot with empty hands.

Then I returned with a bound, and, by a kind of sorcery, my ideas came back of themselves on my way, rising from the floor, coming from the wood-work, and resuming their place, so that, when I arrived at the symbolical divan, I had reconquered my composure, and was ready to move him by other arguments, like the first, only more persuasive.

But I had to make an end of it; it was getting late, and, as I could not keep Monsieur de Civreuse in the dark, I had to take in his lamp. It was evident that so long as I reflected I should keep on making the same ridiculous

attempts, and the only thing to do was to take myself by surprise.

So, with my head down, like something that has been thrown, I went in and walked straight to the bed, trusting to my star to find a lucky phrase to begin with, and I think I was just going to find it.

But Monsieur de Civreuse, after bowing to me, began to look behind me in the back of the room with such singular persistency, bending over to see better, keeping his eye obstinately fixed on the door, that in spite of my preoccupation I turned, possessed with the idea that I had dragged in some absurd thing on my dress. There was nothing at all, and, as I looked surprised—

“I thought you were pursued, mademoiselle,” he said, tranquilly.

Then he put his head back on his pillow with a gesture of relief, letting his eyelid fall with an air of being so much at his ease, that a bolder person than I am might have lost heart, I think. Standing up, motionless, with an evident look of perplexity, beginning words which I could not finish, holding my lamp in my hand, which I forgot to put down, I felt terribly awkward, and would have given much if I could have assumed the superb attitude of Monsieur de Civreuse, or, at least, have known what to do with my hands and feet, which had never seemed so much in my way.

As for him, he leaned back with the majestic nonchalance of a Roman emperor, having no awkward movement to fear in his comfortable position, and insolently making the most of all his advantages.

The thing could not go on long like this without becoming ridiculous ; besides, his provoking coolness stung me like a lash. Since he would not help me, so much the worse ; I would speak straight out as best I could, and explain things to him just as they were.

I did it at once. I advanced another step, and put my lamp on the table.

"Here is your lamp," I began rapidly—that was the very ingenious way in which I began—"and I beg you to accept my sincere regrets for the deplorable accident from which you are still suffering ; but, really, it was not my fault."

"Really, I do not think any one can accuse me of it either," he said, quietly raising his head and looking at me.

"I do not say so," I stammered, losing countenance. And, as he nodded his head in a manner which signified, "Well, this is lucky," I resumed, interrupting myself quickly, "That is to say, I know very well it is my fault, but what I mean to say is, that I did not do it on purpose."

"Mademoiselle, I am sure of it," he answered, with a sarcastic smile.

"For really," I continued, becoming animated, "how could I know that there was any one there? That road belongs to us, and usually no one passes."

"Certainly," he replied, with the same phlegm, "it was I who was in the wrong place, and, from the moment that I was on your land, you were quite in your right. Grand seigneurs are rulers on their own estates,

and have the liberty to settle their quarrels as they like without warning. It is the business of those who pass to look about them, and protect themselves."

"Oh, sir," I exclaimed, "you make me say stupid things that you know very well I do not think, and you answer my request for pardon very maliciously."

And as I felt that the tears were coming in spite of all my efforts, I was going to escape, when he stopped me with a gesture, forgetting this time his insupportable coldness.

"Mademoiselle, it is I who beg your pardon now. I am brutal, and I should like to beat myself for having made the nurse, who has taken such good care of me, weep. Will you forgive me?"

But it is one thing to make tears flow, and another to stop them. I smiled. I answered, "Yes, yes," with my head; but the flow had begun, and had to have its course. I bit my lips in vain; pressed my handkerchief, rolled up into a ball, in my eyes, and with all my trying I resembled a fountain.



From time to time Monsieur de Civreuse repeated his excuses, and really, at the bottom of my heart, I was not sorry to see in that great icy eye a little anxiety and embarrassment. After all the trouble he had given me for a fortnight, it was only just. However, I was not malicious. I calmed myself as soon as I could, for

I saw very well that the scene embarrassed him, and, as soon as I found my voice, we both began at the same time—

“So you are not angry with me?”

“Do you really forgive me?”

I held out my hand to him, taking up my programme where I had left it; only he contented himself with pressing it gently, and he added, smiling, but this time without bitterness:

“So, then, it is a complete amnesty, even for him, is it not?”

And he pointed with his finger at my unfortunate statuette of Saint Joseph, which was back again, I know not by what miracle, in one of the corners of my room.

The color mounted to my eyes, augmenting the heat of my face, which was already burning, while I was sure my nose was swollen and deplorably shiny; and as I did not answer, Monsieur de Civreuse was afraid that I would begin to cry again, and so added, hurriedly:

“You may make yourself easy, mademoiselle. I know nothing of the nature of your wrongs; I only know the punishment, but not its cause.”

“I am sure of that,” I answered; “one would have had to read inside my head for that. I have told no one.”

He did not insist, and I went to bathe my eyes.

The doctor, who has just left, is delighted with the forehead of his patient. He says it is getting well with the rapidity of a miracle; but as to the knee, he told

me in confidence that it is no better yet, and that time, and keeping it perfectly still, are the only things which can completely cure it. Please heaven that Monsieur de Civreuse may consent to swallow these two bitter draughts!

As for me, it is with a relief which I can not express that I now stay with my patient. There is no longer a painful explanation to look forward to, and although his temper is not yet sensibly softened, I feel myself more at ease with him.

He remains slightly melancholy, always cold, with a tendency to irony which is constantly showing itself.

"I was born bad-tempered," he said to me just now, "and as no one thought of pulling up this weed in my spring-time, it is now a small oak, to which even I pay no more attention."

"And what do your friends say of it?" I asked.

"They generally get used to it, or, when they are tired of it, they prune it a little."

"I think they are very good," I could not help saying; "in their places I should look for another shade rather than this small oak, where one does not seem to me safe."

He drew up his eyebrows. It is his way, when he is not pleased and yet does not wish to say so, and I have discovered that it means in words, "Go away!" which I have done.

Finally, I am like his friends, and think that the branches of his oak have particular need of pruning, and that it has grown up crooked but vigorous.

Pierre to Jacques.

My friend, do you know any argument at once more commonplace and more irresistible than tears? It is as old as sin; everybody uses it; everybody knows, too, the simplicity of the proceeding, and, notwithstanding all this, everybody is moved by it in spite of himself. Eve obtained her first pardon and sealed her first reconciliation with this beneficent liquid, and Mademoiselle d'Er-lange—be it said without comparison—has used it so well, just now, that not only is peace signed between us, but it was I who begged for mercy.

Can you imagine a position at once more ridiculous and more embarrassing than that of a man who makes a woman cry, when the woman is a complete stranger to him? With her eyes in her handkerchief, her broken voice, her explanations broken by deep sighs—which he hears in fragments—he feels like an executioner, and he does not know how to act. To look at her is indiscreet. To turn away his head is cynical, for that seems to say, “What does it matter to me?” and he can only confess himself a miserable sinner, and beg pardon humbly.

And then, I do not know if you are like me, but things that are slightly known or rarely experienced make a deeper impression. If I hear of broken bones and cuts, I know what they are. I have had them. But her tears, the impetuous, uninterrupted flood, resembled so little the tears which I have ever shed—rare tears, and always concealed—that I watched them with a vague fear of the unknown, asking myself when and

how it would end, and also what would happen to Mademoiselle d'Erlange afterward, and if she was not in danger of melting entirely, like a nafad who feeds a living spring. So I was ready for any capitulation, and I considered myself most fortunate to barter grievance for grievance, and to give my pardon for that which she vouchsafed me.

There is only this poor saint whom she will not hear of forgiving. I tried to intercede for him, but the facts must have been very serious, for she remained unmoved, and I dared not risk disturbing our peace—so recent and so dearly bought—by too much zeal.

And I, who considered myself master of the situation, quite superior in my just anger to this scatter-brain, who arranged so well in my own mind all the truths that I wished to tell her, and which it would be good for her to hear once! You laugh—traitor! It is very misplaced, I assure you, and I was never more indisposed to acknowledge you in the right. Besides, our peace is at best but an armistice. We are agreed on one point, but only on one—we are not to speak of the cause which has procured us the pleasure of the *tête-à-tête* of a month, which I groan to think of; and, besides, causes of dissension are not wanting, I assure you.

Think of the most dissimilar things in the world—black and white, fire and water, two horses galloping in a circle in opposite directions, so as to knock against each other in every round—and you have us in the large sculptured chamber, where I am being mended

like the most common of knickknacks, and waiting to dry.

But no, my definition is bad. Do not read absolute dissimilarity, for she resembles me, my dear fellow, and it is that which is hateful to me, as I have already told you! She wears a dress, is adorned with a head of hair which I could only have had in the Merovingian age, is endowed with her first freshness of candor and innocence, which also is not mine; but, except this, we are as twin brothers. Yet, for a woman, you will agree, there could be a better model than your friend, and she would gain in grace and charm what she would lose in similitude. Of all types, that of "good fellow" is the one I have always disliked the most. I should like her better dreamy, coquettish, prudish, fanciful, anything that would give me a varied study during my seclusion, rather than this jovial and capricious self-confidence which shows itself in the classical hand-shake, which the nervous hands and pointed elbows of the daughters of Albion have imported for us, and which is the thing I can least easily pardon them—always excepting their ugliness. Just now, all in tears, she was more feminine. But you must not understand that at that moment I was much more amused, nor that I was precisely at my ease; but I like the respect for old usages, and I think young girls should be timid, submissive, a little cowardly, perhaps imaginative, an octave higher than we are, like the difference between the masculine and feminine voice.

After all, perhaps I shall divert myself all the better. I set out in search of new countries, strange types, origi-

nal characters to study, yet it is said that what Frenchmen know the least is France! Let us study France, since we are in it, and you must receive my traveler's notes with the same good-will as if they came to you from the banks of the sacred Ganges, or the not less sacred heights of the Himalayas. They will have at least the merit of being more recent than after a longer journey; and when one thinks of all the charming things Bernardin de St. Pierre discovered in a simple strawberry-leaf, I must be very stupid if I can not do as much for the greater space in which I am.

But I wander from my subject. I browse on philosophical questions, like a simple donkey on the bushes by the road, and the equipage in which I am taking you is a little shaken by it, I think. You want a true history, do you not? We were at the tears of Made-moiselle d'Erlange, and I am sure you think that with a word I would stop them, as I confess I made them burst forth. I would make excuses, it would be over, and we should then be better friends than ever.

O my friend, God forbid that you should ever provoke a crisis which you find yourself unable to control in a moment, for it is terrible! One feels one's



self helpless before an overwhelming torrent, it is said, because it is something which one can not master. What will you say to me, then, of a young girl's tears? Can dikes be made against them? I became gentle—humble, in truth; I gave up everything, and the stream still flowed, and it was marvelous to see the same little handkerchief, no bigger than the palm of my hand, turned over and over, kneaded on all sides, and yet sufficient for the work! All folded up, it just filled the hollow of her eye; so exactly, in fact, that she had to dry one eye after the other, but it was done so quickly that one could hardly see the one which was uncovered; and, in spite of my embarrassment, I could not help watching curiously this admirable dexterity.

I should say, however, that Mademoiselle d'Erlange did not abuse her position. She calmed herself as soon as she could, held out her hand without ill-feeling, and at my request sat down by me, without running away as she evidently wanted to do.

I had now to retrieve myself, and I felt that my moment of blundering had to be paid for by great amiability. I had to give myself the trouble to talk, to amuse her, to take away the too great violence of my brutality, and I think I did not come out of it badly.

At the beginning, her words were interrupted by deep sighs—real sighs, like those of a child in distress—and a tear would come from time to time and require the help of the famous handkerchief; but little by little she became animated, so much so that at the end of a few minutes I could hardly follow her.

It seems to be a real pleasure to her to talk; she does it with vivacity, without much connection, as if it were simply a healthy gymnastic exercise for her tongue. Questions, reflections, facts, rush out in curious confusion: she takes her ideas from the heap, without sorting them, and scatters them as one scatters seed to the sparrows. "Hop! hop!—catch who can!" I will bet a good deal that the parable of the sower in the Bible has never occupied her attention much, and that what is lost in the thorns of the road or among the rocks is one of the last things she thinks about.

Do not imagine, however, that it is vulgar gossip; her inexhaustible animation is rather the result of superabundant vitality; and if I am not deceived, she thus spends her forces because she has nothing else to do, though she gives herself occupation, I assure you! While she talks, she goes and comes, plays with her dog, arranges and disarranges the fire twenty times in an hour, so that she half puts it out and fills the room with smoke. Then she opens the windows, excusing herself, and builds up a fire, the flames of which dart so high that they have to be put out with a pail of water to keep us from a greater misfortune.

Sitting, she brings up her two feet under her in the Turkish fashion—like her coffee—and balances her body, as she talks, in a way most dangerous for her equilibrium, which, to be just, she keeps marvelously. I got out of breath merely by looking at her.

"You are feverish," my doctor said to me a little later; "what is the matter? Have we given you

hearty food too soon, and must we go back to dosing you with sick-man's broth?"

"It would be better to dose this will-o'-the wisp," I felt like saying.

But, to consider the whole question, Jacques, you must remember that fourteen hours a day of solitude is a great deal when one is incapable of moving. I must not complain too much of distractions.

Our very varied conversation has given me some ideas of the people and things around us.

The château, of which I have perhaps spoken a little too grandly, is not exactly what I expected it

to be, and is like stage scenery, which looks very differently seen from before and behind. Its grandeur dates from Louis XIII and its downfall from the Revolution; which proves, as M. Prudhomme

would tell you, that happiness is more lasting in this world than misfortune, contrary to the general opinion, and which signifies simply that one hundred years is the extreme limit during which walls consent to stand without help. Whatever the reason may be, an



entire wing, a belfry, and two towers have already disappeared from this noble building.

They fell easily, like well-bred towers, as people who are tired of standing sit on the floor for want of a better place. Then, the ivy which they dragged down got green again; wild grasses and wild flowers, seeing that no one thought of rooting them up, began to bloom; and the next year birds made their nests there, finding good shelter in such a pleasant wilderness.

"A story of old walls," you will tell me; "I know your ruin before you describe it; these châteaux in decay all resemble one another."

And do the ways in which owners act resemble one another also? Do you think that you have seen many places where they behave as they do at Erlange under these circumstances?

When the crevices become too numerous, and the cracks make the walls look like people who are at their last gasp, and the stones yield too much to the wind, each member of the family takes her belongings, everything that can be moved without too much trouble, and philosophically transports herself and her baggage to another more hospitable portion still standing.

The first tempest gets the better of the abandoned tenement: it sinks, and becomes the palace of bats and owls; while the emigrants remake their nests, accommodating themselves to their new quarters, finding out advantages and disadvantages, no more affected by the change than a tribe of ancient Gauls that moved its

camp in the morning to find a new country and new game at evening!

They have thus successively left the north tower for the south tower, and the right wing for the center; and if the center gives way in its turn—and with these snows, which crush everything, one must be prepared—there will remain the left wing, which was more recently repaired, with one or two towers, besides the chapel and the servants' rooms.

This gives sufficient shelter for Mademoiselle d'Erlange and her pets, which is likely to endure, and of course for the lifetime of the mysterious aunt, with whom I am still unacquainted, and whom I sometimes think a myth.

All this is certainly the highest philosophy, if it is not madness, and yet it is the fact. Mademoiselle d'Erlange even seems to consider the state of affairs quite of course. To hear her, one would think that she was speaking of the most insignificant change, like the necessity of changing one's seat in a garden when the sun turns the corner of your sheltering tree, or other similar protection.

"But when the house was falling, what would you have done?" she asked me, seeing me open my eyes; "would you have stayed where you were?"

"No, but I would have restored it," I answered.

"With whom? With Benoîte and me as masons, and Françoise to mix the plaster with her feet?"

"Who is Françoise?"

"My mare—a good old beast, who knocks with her

foot on the stable-door when she wants to go in. I will show her to you some day. She is my third affection."

"But do you not think," I said, "that it is a pity to let a fine building like this go to pieces, and does your aunt not think so?"

"Hum!" she replied, shrugging her shoulders and laughing ironically, "my aunt is sure that the walls of Erlange will outlast her, and as she is certain of a shelter to the end of her days, what difference do you suppose the 'afterward' makes to her?"

I dared not insist, as the conversation was becoming too personal, and we returned to generalities. My young companion told me gayly how she had furnished her room, dragging out of all the others what remained in them, and even going to the chapel for the *prie-dieus*.

This is the explanation of the large proportion of monachal seats which struck me when I first awoke.

She calls them odd chairs, and in speaking of them she drags one after the other before my bed to show them to me.

"They are all alike; there is not much variety," she said, turning them round, "but they are very pretty beside my sofas. Have you seen the figures on my sofas?"

And she set to work dragging one to me, rolling it from one end of the room to the other with a frightful noise, and pushing it back against the wall in the same rapid way.

From all I can learn, the château is dismantled outside and inside, which has set me wondering what band of robbers could have thus devastated it. Imprudence and carelessness can not alone have done it, for years do not destroy all the furniture of a château without the aid of some misfortune. This idea troubled me; for in such a case my presence would be a heavy expense to my hostesses, and I had decided to consult the doctor, when Mademoiselle d'Erlange took the bull by the horns, reading my thought with marvelous insight, and translating it with great accuracy.

"Now you are full of anxiety because we are not so rich as you thought we were!" she exclaimed. "Re-assure yourself! If the tables and chairs necessary to refurnish the house do not grow at Erlange, we have plenty of vegetables, without counting chickens and ducks; and as my aunt, who cares a great deal about her dear self, always finds means to provide, it is evident that she has not reached the bottom of her stocking, and that famine does not threaten us yet. You must remember, too, that it is wrong to worry about it, for it is certainly not your fault that you are here, and it is everywhere the custom for people to feed their prisoners."

This frank explanation put me at my ease, and I had only to apologize for having deprived Mademoiselle d'Erlange of her room, and to ask as a favor to be taken somewhere else. But she refused, telling me that "somewhere else" was a pretentious phrase here, and besides that she wished to keep me in the place

where the crime was committed, so as to make a sort of expiatory chapel of it.

All this made me understand better a strange feature which struck me in the beginning, about the inequalities of the table-service, and now I can explain the medley of the Sèvres china, Venetian glass in which my wine looks like liquefied gold, massive silver which I do not like to see Mademoiselle d'Erlange handle too near me, and table-cloths of coarse unbleached linen, with a thirteen-sou knife.

Yesterday I was struggling with a knife, tearing my meat like a puppy, using the blade and the back in turn without success, and nearly losing my patience.

"It cuts badly, does it not?" said Mademoiselle d'Erlange, who looked at me delighted, "and you are getting angry. Wait—I have something which will help you do it."

She ran to a drawer, and triumphantly brought me back a little dagger in an ivory sheath, which she drew out quickly, the steel flashing with a blue light, and all with such vivacity that I shuddered.

"There," she said; "it cuts perfectly—I always use it for my pens. Will you have it?"

Such is my table-service, my friend; and now you have a good enough idea of my shelter, also of the persons about me: the phantom aunt, my doctor, "One," and finally Mademoiselle Colette, for that is the name of Mademoiselle d'Erlange, who kindly informed me of the fact, as also of the reflections which suggested themselves to her.

"A queer name, is it not?" said she, "Col—Colette. Why not Colerette? What does it mean, and where can it have come from?"

"A saint of the calendar, I suppose—"

"Possibly; I never thought of that! I thought it had been invented for me. Do you know her, then, this Saint Colette? Perhaps you have prayed to her against toothache? It appears that it is a sure thing, and that one is certain of being cured in addressing one's self to her!"

"I confess I have not," I replied; "for one reason, my teeth have got on very well by themselves, up to the present time, and, for another, your want of success would disgust me forever with nine days' prayers, for I should never be conceited enough to suppose I could succeed where you had failed so completely."

She blushed to her fingers' ends, turning away her head, but in a moment she resumed, though in a lower tone:

"Oh, what I wanted was very difficult; that is the reason."

She was evidently afraid of discouraging me by her want of success, and of leading me into temptation or revolt; so, half for her frankness, half because I feared I might have wounded her, I added in conclusion:

"Certainly one should never despair of anything; perhaps what you asked for is nearer than you think."

As to Saint Colette, I believe only very moderately in her virtues, this is the truth; but if you can hear of one of the celestial beings who presides over the healing of

broken bones, burn a candle before him, my friend, for unfortunately I do not get any better.

March 28th.

Lately an idea has come to me, and it is in vain that I shrug my shoulders in its face to show that I think it absurd; it stays there, and is so firmly fixed that I can think of nothing else.

But it is so foolish that, in order to write it, I shut and bolt my door, and turn over two pages, so as to put the ridiculous idea by itself.

By much thinking of my last adventure, of the violent manner in which I treated my poor saint, of my anger, and the result of it, finally of the day when M. de Civreuse was brought into Erlange, I asked myself—I have thought it possible—to speak plainly, I have the idea that perhaps, in spite of all, Saint Joseph heard my prayer, and that M. de Civreuse is the savior and the hero I asked for.

I know very well that he was not coming to Erlange, and that he did not think of me, and that his manner of acting at present is anything but gallant. But this coincidence! I asked for help, and here suddenly into my secluded life comes a young man, original, interesting if not amiable, and exactly the kind of which heroes are made. Is it not really help from heaven? The ill-humor and fury of my aunt are sure proofs of it, and her daily attacks show me that she thinks, as I do, that the liberator of Colette has come.

When I make all sorts of excuses to my poor statue, which I have taken back, it seems to me that its eye smiles on me as it did before, and that it says to me, "You see very well that you despaired too soon, and that I did not deceive you in the least!" The next minute I say to myself that I am crazy, and the cold face of M. de Civreuse comes up before me. He cares for me just as much as he does for my dog, and it is easy to see that he is exasperated at the fate which keeps him here.

But if it were his destiny, he had to come, and he ought even to be quite satisfied to be damaged as he is—otherwise, he might have gone by!

Does his appearance exactly resemble my summer dreams? I can hardly remember, for now, when I try to recall the picture of my shadowy hero, it is the face of Monsieur Pierre which comes up before me, and I do not turn back to the first pages of my book to see whether I am mistaken or not, for I think he is very well as he is.

His forehead, of which one does not see much now, is evidently high and wide; his hair is chestnut, cut short, and his Roman nose is rather too long, it seems to me; his lips are always tightly pressed together, his beard is not exactly a beard, neither is it simply a mustache, and I should very much like to ask him exactly what it is called.

As to the color of his eye—of his eyes, rather, for I suppose the other is just like the one I know—it is peculiar, neither blue nor gray, and resembles nothing so much as the spring-water in which I used to look at

myself last year. One sees every color in it, even the color of the clouds that seem to pass over it from time to time, for the hue changes with his emotions, and grows light or dark in an instant.

His complexion is dark except where a line divides the forehead; from there to the hair the skin is white, which looks very queer. One might think that the face had been painted all of one tint up to that, and that the color had then given out, leaving it as it was.

His disposition is brusque; he is not very amiable, and he seems like a man so accustomed to do as he likes that the wills of other people count for very little with him.

I imagined a tyrant who would tyrannize over all the world, but I fancied him softer toward me.

But, after all, when I have dreamed of all this, I realize perfectly the folly there is in such an idea. Prince Charming never made himself so little charming to please the lady of his heart!—and am I not obliged to perceive that Monsieur de Civreuse resembles a chained mastiff, a learned mastiff, a well-educated mastiff, understanding the manners of good society, but who, it is evident, does not like his kennel in the least?

And could I accommodate myself to this severe humor? It seems that as if by some spell all that I do and all that I say is exactly what I ought not to do or say, and I give the eyebrows of my companion the pleasure of constant gymnastic exercise—he is forced to raise them so often in the lively astonishment I cause him. But one certainly is not to be blamed for every-

thing when one has waited eighteen years for her liberty and a little happiness.

On the other hand, Mother Lancien seemed very sure of what she said in promising me success, and she has seen so much, and I so little !

Pierre to Jacques.

Ah, my friend, how well I knew what you would say, and how perfectly your last letter is characteristic of you !

You take fire, you excite yourself, you build a whole romance out of nothing, and send it to me by express, even asking me if you are not too late, and if your congratulations will arrive before or after the ceremony.

This accident which lays me low on the highway, the old château into which I am carried insensible, this young girl who watches over me night and day, watering my pillow with her tears—all intoxicate and transport you ; you see me in love, kneeling at the feet of my idol—as much as a man with a broken leg can kneel—blessing the bad roads because that solitude in such company is a joy, pleased with my sufferings because they have given me access to Erlange, and the winter because it makes our eagle's nest inaccessible to the envious and jealous.

Ah, my dear Jacques, I have not your inflammable temperament nor your vivid imagination ; and you ought to remember that formerly, when we went into society,

I had white hair in comparison with your fanciful head and wild caprices.

While you, the insatiable, devoured one or even two passions in one evening, falling so violently in love with your partners that after the ball you even dreamed of marriage, I hardly gave my heart once a week, and I have even gone from one Sunday to another, or a fortnight, without feeling a heart-beat.

And now, when I have quarreled with the whole human race, with my comrades of the boulevards as well as society, when I am satiated with all, you expect me to fall in love like a school-boy, and to accept fetters when I have just shaken off the last burden! No, no; and if you would like the place, Jacques, by the honor of a Civreuse, I will give up the whole to you without regret—the bed with columns, the plaster moldings, and the little blonde into the bargain.

Have you already forgotten, my poor friend, the two years that are just past? Evidently you have, for they have been by you devoted to my interests, and with your noble delicacy you have considered it a crime to remember. Only, it is not the same for me, for there are certain things the bitterness of which remains on the lips, no matter what one does to drive it away, and my experiences are among the number.

I was so simple-minded, you see, so absurdly confident, so convinced of the truth of all I was told! I had thirty intimate friends, and I believed all to be true, all devoted and sincere.

I was warmly welcomed in twenty houses in Paris;

and, believing myself to be received in remembrance of my mother, I came and went and acted as though she herself had presented me, without the slightest mental reservation—the only person, it seems, who was perfectly open and sincere.

Poor fool! who forgot only one thing: that all the attentions belonged to the income of three hundred thousand francs, which, as an orphan, was completely at my own disposal.

Then, one morning, the sudden ruin—do you remember? My banker—also one of those friends—who had put my capital in such doubtful investments that he had not even dared consult me before swallowing it up, had gone off finally to America, and at once my own position showed itself.

The telegraph is slow in comparison with the news which is carried from mouth to mouth! Four hours after my ruin I had become a very small personage; everybody knew it, and by the end of the week I was forgotten. Events follow each other so quickly in Paris! After my affair came the fall of a ministry, a private divorce case of which all the papers spread the news with all their might—and you can see that the wave which overwhelmed me was a broad one.

All my intimacy in families came to an end. Why invite a man who is not a possible suitor? And it was only then that I perceived that in each of these exclusive circles the daughter of the house was invariably between eighteen and twenty.

As to my friends, Jacques, they all behaved perfectly!

There was not one of them who would not cross the street or the boulevard to come and take my hand on seeing me on the other sidewalk, not one who did not express his sympathy.

“Poor Civreuse! What bad luck!”

“What a wretch D—is! He is expelled from the Bourse, you know. By-the-way, will your sale take place at the Hôtel Drouot? The season is excellent; that’s a good thing.”

“What a descent, poor fellow! On my word, it is enough to disgust a man, and keep him from making deposits anywhere but in his mattress!”

It is very nice, all that, and it went to my heart. But at the end of two weeks my sale was over, my entresol rented, I had no more Mondays—you know my receptions when I kept open table? I had given up supping at the Café Anglais; and, worse than all, I had crossed the Seine!

Does any one look for a needle in a hay-stack, or for a man who lodges near the Jardin des Plantes? Honestly, no! and in less than two weeks I had that absolute peace dreamed of by sufferers, but which in a great city, where one has lived a happy life, is rather isolation than repose.

My story might have ended there, and a full stop put, unless, in a parenthesis, any one wanted to tell my struggle with poverty, if by good fortune, besides my thirty intimate friends, I had not had another, the thirty-first, who, by-the-way, I had never put in the heap with the others.

More skillful than the rest, this one found out my retreat, and, once inside the place, boldly opened my strong-box, and, finding it empty as he expected, put his arm through mine and carried me off to his home, to share his life with him for two whole years.

And it was not only the offer, friend Jacques—allow me to say it for once to your face, since I have the chance—it was making it in such a manner, that I accepted at once, and that I have lived a parasite with you all this time without the slightest hesitation.

Do not protest! it was really as a parasite, for you know as well as I do what is paid for labor to people who seek places because they need them, without having gone through the administrative routine which is the glory of our France.

I can not remember exactly what it was I gained; but if during these days of trouble I paid the fourth part of my rent and my washing, it was because things were made cheaper for me, I am sure!

What trade could I take up? While I was only an amateur, I was enough of an artist to get my pictures into the *Salon*; but as soon as it was known that I needed to sell, I became such a poor dauber that I could not get fifty francs for a picture six yards long! As for music, it was not to be spoken of. To play the guitar under balconies was charming, but as a professor, the only thing I would have needed was pupils.

The choice remained to me of supernumerary in the department of finance—three years of hopes and ambitious dreams, which one indulges in while thinking of

the fifteen hundred francs that will crown this novitiate; or diplomacy and consulships, without the possibility of buying myself gloves or patent-leather shoes, which are the sinews of war in the social struggle; finally, there was journalism.

Besides this, when one has refused to sell one's name to founders of doubtful companies, tell me, if you can, how an honest man can find employment in Paris?

I thought of emigrating, and without you it is most probable that I would have followed the man who had cheated me beyond the seas.

But you were there, and I stayed, with my heart a little embittered, I confess, by all I had seen, but far from imagining the complete change that awaited me, and the study from life that would enable me to complete from life the portrait of the human animal.



After all, it was only necessary for me to open the pages of *La Rochefoucauld*, and I should have found it all already set forth. But who believes *La Rochefoucauld* before having experienced for himself his bitter wisdom?

In short, I do not need to recall to you the conclusion of the comedy that came to me one fine morning. The wheel had gone round, and Dame Fortune gave me with one hand what she had taken with the other. My old rascal, richer than ever, died suddenly, leaving

neither will nor children, and his petroleum-wells, eagerly claimed by all his dupes, gave each one of us our rights. Our claims were good, and we were paid even the interest on the money—involuntary savings which we had made during the past two years.

Three days after—do you remember, Jacques?—congratulations and cards rained on us, and I was again in possession of all my excellent friends. It was my own fault if I could not think it all a bad dream. I was awake, and all that I had believed lost came back by the same door—gold and friendship.

But this was too much! With a little patience, perhaps, I could have been deceived. But in twenty-four hours to take up life just where I had left it—a breakfast accepted two years before that I was reminded of; a waltz of two years back grown yellow on the card that they wanted me to recall—it was at once unworthy and grotesque, and I laughed, disgusted at heart.

Simply to refuse everything was too little. I had had my eyes opened, had become suspicious, cynical, and with malicious pleasure I entered into all combinations, flattered all hopes, fostered all ambitions, so as to make the disappointment greater the day when I should snap at once the threads of all the puppets I held in my hand.

Then, sore, weary, forcibly separated from you by the illness of your uncle and the secluded winter it necessitated for you, finding too feeble all words which express hatred of the human race, I was seized with

the desire to hear lying in Chinese, in Arabian, in Hindostani, as I had heard it in French, so as to see for myself whether my country is in advance of its contemporaries, or behind them.

And this is the moment you choose to speak to me of love, of household peace, and the sweet confidence which charms its hours!

My poor Jacques, you are a great fool, and, if Mademoiselle d'Erlange is no worse than other women—which is not certain—she is at least like all the rest, which is enough to drive me away.

The proof you use to convince me that I am in love, amused me at least:

“You say that you are always with her, you speak to her, you look at her, you call her a blonde fairy; be frank, Pierre—confess that you are in love!”

That I may not be with her, have I legs to fly from her? Do you want me to turn my head away when I speak to her? And need you see in the fancies of my first awakening anything more than the ordinary humor of travelers recounting their adventures?

As for her being blonde, my friend, I can not help it; she is blonde, and I have told you so plainly, thinking no evil. This brings me back to your complaints on the subject of Mademoiselle d'Erlange: “You oblige me to imagine her for myself,” you write; “except her hair, not a bit of description, and you write pages about the tapestry, the crumbling towers—in fact, all sorts of nonsense. I have the frame, I know it by heart. Put the Greuze in it, I beg you.”

Here it is, and sincere, with a sincerity which my impartial eyes can guarantee to be true.

Mademoiselle Colette is rather small, or, if not so really, appears so. Does this come from her wonderfully slender waist, from her head which is small, like that of a Greek statue, or from the quickness and multiplicity of her movements? I can not tell. But it is certain that, standing—in the rare moments when she is still—she rises up straight and high, like a swaying young birch-tree, and I look at her in surprise. Whence has she taken that extra height?

Then some new idea seizes her: she starts off to the right or left with her gliding step, and is only an elf who has escaped from her home in the early morning, and has come to visit the world. Now you know, my friend, elves have neither stature nor age.

Her nose is short, delicate, and a little saucy; the lower part of the face is pretty, plump like a ripe fruit, and her complexion is dark and rich.

Do not read yellow—we are not in Cambodia; she has a transparent skin, beneath which a ray of sunlight is always shining. She has a high forehead, a well-made mouth; and as for her eyes, I tell you frankly that they are superb; you ought to understand this properly, but you will take it in the wrong sense, I am sure, and you will see flames and passion where there is only a conscientious description, as in a passport; for even a passport would note them, I am sure, and put them down as “special marks,” so little do they resemble what one usually sees.

Large, superbly shaped—I may as well give you the whole truth this evening, for you would call for it to-morrow—these eyes are the deepest black, and from their depths come an unceasing flash.

When the eyelid is lowered, it bears the calm of an infant asleep; raised, it is overpowering, and it seems as though some inner light were illuminating the burning iris.

Do black diamonds exist? I do not know, though I have often heard them spoken of, but I think I know now what they must be like.

The distinctive characteristic of the look is a mobility of expression the variety of which nothing can describe, and her general vivacity shows itself in that. One really seems to see ideas pass over the face, and these great eyes, where thoughts can be read as in a book, are ready to betray her.

Her eyebrows are clear and finely penciled. They are drawn with one stroke of the brush.

Finally, to complete this mixture of grace and malice, imagine on the left side above the lip a very small dimple, lifting a corner of the mouth so that it only smiles on one side at a time, as if on the sly, and giving her an inexpressible look of gayety.

I will not tell you that Mademoiselle Colette has the hands and feet of a child, because to me such a comparison seems absurd. Would you like to finish the portrait of a slender young girl with two fat round feet as wide as they are long, and little baby hands full of dimples? It makes me shudder!

But the D'Erlanges have good blood, and it shows itself.

To sum up, she is an original person, remarkable in many ways. I am sure you would admire her immensely, and that you would write a sonnet to her every evening. An artist would be dumb with delight before her, only he could not paint her as she is. However, some day I will ask her permission to try, and the first adventure of my journey shall occupy the first page of my album.

"Well! what more?" I hear you say. Well, is one obliged to fall in love with all that is beautiful? I describe her to you as an artist would, as I shall describe in three months' time the palaces, lotus-flowers, and almehs—if so it be that almehs exist elsewhere than in ballets; but if you are going to fancy a new romance with each new face which I present to you, I shall be reduced to writing to you in negro style:

"Good little traveler arrived well. Had good passage. He not had sea-sickness. Found nice hut to live in. Embrace little white brother."

One must take the world as it is, my friend; nobody in it is worth much when I have put you and myself on one side, for we are too good for the dolls whom we know, doting upon equipages, diamonds, and dresses. So I have long ago made a vow of celibacy in your name and mine. We suffice for each other. Sign the contract, and give up romance.

As for your delicate advice on the subject of *Mademoiselle Colette*, be at ease, moralist; if I am bronze,

she is crystal, and I do not think my appearance is likely to affect her. And, besides, what do you suppose a creature who laughs all day can know of sentiment? She is not a woman; she is a bell always in motion, and one might suppose that the life we lead is the most amusing thing possible.

You know what she really is; and just now, when Mademoiselle d'Erlange was dancing about the room, giving herself up to the little skips and jumps that are habitual to her, dusting china and fancy articles, which I, following her listlessly with my eye and listening to her incessant humming, could not help questioning her about—

"What is it," I asked, "that makes you so gay, and why have you always a smile on your lips?"

"My good spirits!" she answered. "Do I trouble you?"

"Not at all; only you astonish me, that is all."

"That is certainly not much like you," she answered, quickly. "And if I may inquire in my turn, why do you never laugh?"

"Just now, on account of my suffering," I replied, dryly. Then, as I was ashamed of this barefaced falsehood, and above all of the bad humor which the remembrance of the past gave me, I continued, "But I suppose that my humor is generally the opposite of yours."

She raised her eyes, which had been hidden, with a quick look, and said:

"Bad humor, then?"

"Yes, bad, doubtless; at least for those who look

upon laughing as the sign of an amiable disposition, and not as a grimace or a simple family contortion, confirming the opinion of those who think we descend from monkeys."

"From monkeys!" She drew back with a frightened gesture, taking in at a rapid glance her hands and her whole person. "I never heard that! Is it true? How do they know?" Then, as she saw me shake my head: "No, no, I am glad," she continued, before I could edge in a word; "it would be funny, but so disgusting. Just think what one would feel on seeing a baboon in a cage and saying to one's self that he ought to be venerated as an ancestor! It is quite enough to look like him when one laughs."

She ran to a glass, which was hung so high that she had to mount on a table, and, seeing her dimple come—

"It is very possible, after all," she said, philosophically, "that it is a contortion, but it does one good all the same." And she began laughing more than ever in proof of what she had said, and jumped down with the bound of a gazelle, without noise or effort.

As you see, her credulity, like her gayety, is that of a child, and she did not get over her amusement for some minutes; then, as I remained perfectly serious, she sat down, calmed herself, and resumed in a lower tone:

"Perhaps, when one is very much older and wiser, one does not care for it any more; but I have not come to that yet."

This is too much, Jacques! Does she take me for a

patriarch? Have you seen that I am getting old, or showing signs of age?

So you see you need not be uneasy, or think there is peril around me.

I look upon her as a thoughtless child, as I have told you; and she, on her side, considers me so wise and respectable that she nearly puts me in the same category with her grandfather, the baboon. So we are both safe.

And now, my good Jacques, give up inventing romances, and sleep without dreams; my little girl and I wish you good-night.

But look out for yourself, my friend; you see how quickly old age creeps over us, and some fine day it will take you unawares.

You who are so old, so old!

They are going to take off my bandage this evening. I wonder how my wound will look? I am a little anxious about it, I confess.

If the scar is honorable, I will bear it; but if there is a big round hole showing the mark of the rod or of the pedestal, I will call Mademoiselle Colette and her executioner to answer for it. Zounds! one has his small vanities, no matter how old he is!

April 12th.

To say that my intimacy with M. de Civreuse increases—no, it is just the same to-day as it was yesterday. He is just the same now as he was when he first came to himself—polite as a king, but peevish as a bear,

and sarcastic in proportion, and our slightest conversations are skirmishes.

"Why are you all the time squabbling with your gentleman?" Benoitte said to me yesterday; "it is not good for him, you know."



"What can I do, you dear old thing?" I answered; "he sees red and I white. I can not let him say things that are false, and approve just because he is ill, when he takes up everything I say so quickly. It is more than I can bear."

It is true that every morning and every evening I tell myself that if I were different I would please him better, and I vow that I will change the next day; but as soon as I am in the room and hear the calm tone in which he criticises indifferently men and things, I am vexed in spite of myself, and I answer him with all the vivacity and indignation that I feel. Or, when I am seated before the fire, listening to the melting snow as it drips from the broken gutters with a loud noise, and I see in the back of the room his dark face, and hear the full voice that answers or questions me, in the midst of this April sun which glances through the window, I feel such bursts of joy that I begin to laugh without any reason, and am happy, happy!

All this seems absurd to M. de Civreuse, and he

launches out as he did yesterday, giving himself much trouble to prove to me that there is nothing to be proud of, that all this gayety is only a family inheritance and past education, and that we laugh as monkeys make grimaces, and nothing else.

Was it to frighten me that he said it, or did he half believe it? I never make out more than half the truth of the things he speaks of—and if it is true, what can I do about it? Must I deprive myself of the pleasure of laughing and moving about, because of an accidental or even natural resemblance; and ought I to stop cracking nuts with my teeth and jumping over obstacles in two or three bounds? This is much more like the monkeys.

He is a pedant, and we will leave him to his criticisms, if he goes on like this, for I have forgotten to warn him, and to make the condition with my saint in the good days when I prayed to him and we understood each other about the personal appearance of my liberator; but Colette must be loved as she is, with her dog, her faults, her laugh, her peculiar ideas, and her sash tied wrong side out, or she will return to her own affairs, and continue to hunt for stars until she finds a good and real one which has not quenched all its rays in water before coming to her.

The truth is, that I am furious—furious not only that M. de Civreuse does not find me to his liking, and thinks me ugly, foolish, and I do not know what besides, but furious, above all, because, in spite of all I can do, I can not pay him in his own coin.

Sometimes I am ready to run to him and declare that, if his opinion of me is not flattering, mine of him is just the same; but I mistrust my tongue. Really, I do not think so at all; and what if my invectives should turn to compliments? It is frightful to think of! I do not know how one can learn to say in the same tone what one thinks and what one does not believe the first word of; and his ear is too quick not to know the difference.

So I am silent, and when I get back to my room, with all the doors closed, I make amends by roughly questioning my imagination and my heart.

"Listen," I say to them face to face, "explain yourselves. Where do this folly and this infatuation come from?"

"What has this man done for you? He is not amiable, hardly polite, certainly less handsome than we are, and it is plain that we do not suit him.

"What effort does he make to conceal it from you? Has he attempted a tender or a gallant word in three weeks—even a word of two syllables with as little meaning as a poor little sigh? Does one of you know more about it than I do? Speak!"

Neither of them says much, but their answer, though short, is decisive. "They like him all the same."

And that is why I find myself thinking of M. de Civreuse a little, often—always, I think—yet without being completely satisfied with him, and without exactly understanding what he has in the depths of his heart.

Sometimes I wonder, when I see the astonished look with which he follows my slightest word, if he does not, like me, come from an old château in ruins, where the ditches and portcullis have kept him until now from the sight of women, as my battlements have preserved me from all contact with human beings.

But, in that case, he must have crossed his draw-bridge long ago, for his knowledge of human nature, if not kindly, is extensive, and he knows many things whose very names I am ignorant of. For that reason we have ridiculous conversations, during which I answer without knowing what I say, during which we quarrel without my comprehending exactly why, and during which I am not quite certain that he himself knows what he wants.

Yesterday, for instance, we spoke of people in society. I told him how little I knew outside of Erlange, and begged him to tell me what men are, and what they do outside of my world.

Then he began, but described what I asked in such a way that I listened stupefied to hear him call all men rogues and wretches. Is it a joke, or must one really believe it? If so, one would never dare to put one foot before the other: there an ambush, here a snare, farther on a mine that only waits your pressure to explode—these are the usual things, according to him, and on the outside of all flowers, smiles, and engaging words.

Is it literally true, and is he speaking of real mines full of powder? I do not know; at the beginning I

listened quietly, but afterward I could not help protesting.

"In this case," I cried, "your world is a robbers' den!"

To which he calmly replied :

"It certainly resembles one very much."

And when I protested, getting indignant, and asking if he were sure of what he said—

"I speak of it as a traveler does of the place where his watch and purse have been taken from him," he replied ; "that is all."

Has he really been robbed ? I could not help asking him further if it were so, and without emotion, and dryly enough, he answered :

"Of my faith and confidence, yes, mademoiselle. Do you not think that they are as precious as doubloons and a valise ?"

Such is my guest, and such are his peculiarities. In such a case, what can I answer ? I am dumfounded, and could understand his conversation more easily if he chose to speak Chinese.

In conclusion, he seems to me to have few illusions. If I have been drowning myself in chimeras and dreams for eighteen years, I think I have come to the right port at last.

He makes no exceptions—we are no better than others ; and as I put my sex in view, hoping for a courteous word for women—

"Oh," he said, "each one has his instincts. Wolves bite, tigers fly at you with their claws ! Do you think one is much better than another ?"

Really, it is not right to decide things in this cold-blooded way, and I am sure that God, who sees into our hearts, does not.

I was wild to stop him, or at least to embarrass him ; so, planting myself directly in front of him, I said :

“And I, whom you do not know—what am I, then?”

“In bud or in flower,” said he, with a half-smile, “I can not say which, but I am sure that all the instincts are there.”

Really, I could have beaten him ; so, not knowing how to prove my point—

“And Monsieur Jacques?” I asked.

“Jacques!” and instantly changing his tone—
“Jacques! he has all the delicacy, all the goodness, all the courage on earth united in one man!”

“Then he is an exception,” said I, ironically.

“Precisely ; the exception that confirms the rule.”

“What does that mean?”

“Oh, in truth, no great thing ; it is a thing to say, a much-used phrase.”

“Very well,” I cried in bad humor ; “it should be caught and put in a cage ; it has no sense.”

I knew very well that I spoke foolishly ; but I was vexed, I did not know why.

M. de Civreuse laughed without answering, and, beginning where he left off, resumed the praises of his friend. He had raised himself in bed, he spoke quickly ; it seemed as if he had a second tongue, and for the first time I saw him animated.

And he was interesting, this Jacques—good and handsome! Really, I got to liking him. It seemed as though I were having one of those kingdoms in fairy-land described to me—where everything is perfect, the streams of sirup, the rocks of candied sugar, and for hot days a gentle shower of rain perfumed with vanilla! So, when Monsieur Pierre lay back on his pillow with a satisfied air—



"Well!" I exclaimed with conviction, "I feel that I should like your friend very much."

On which he turned sharply, and, scowling with his terrible eyebrows, looked me full in the face.

"I beg you to believe, *mademoiselle*," he said, in his most disagreeable tone, "that it would make him proud and happy."

And I, without reflecting a second, replied in turn, not less sharply:

"Yes, doubtless; not every one is liked who wishes to be."

After that there was silence—a heavy, threatening silence.

Can anything be more singular than such a character, and is there any explanation for our conversation? This is a sample of our usual talks, and I do not know why, but three times out of four they end in disputes.

Still, could I have done otherwise this time? After having borne his gallant classification which put me among wolves, if I were not among the tigers, I agreed with his praises of his friend, and he was angry at once.

His face turned toward the wall, as indifferent to all about him as if he came from the moon, M. de Civreuse began to whistle a gay march, drumming an accompaniment with his fingers on the bed-spread.

I, tired already of this silence, moved about, trying to think of some way to begin the conversation again, and biting my nails one after the other. But that made less noise than the march, and in spite of myself I followed the *da capo* movement, the rhythm of which made me beat time without knowing it. "La—la—la, la, la, la!" We could not go on like that; besides, I felt like doing some mischief. "The third time it is repeated, I will speak," I said to myself. And as the third came before I had an idea in my head, I pulled the cross-piece of the table with my foot, and over it went, with all that was on it, making a frightful noise! I had miscalculated the absolute coolness of M. Pierre. He quietly finished his tune without moving, and as I murmured confusedly—

"It is the table—I caught my foot in it—"

"Ah!" he said.

The disaster had to be repaired. A cup full of something had been spilled in the fall.

"Lick it, good dog," said I to "One," showing him the liquid.

At last M. de Civreuse stopped, and, after looking at what we were doing—

“It is the cup which had morphine in it,” he said, quietly; “he will sleep until to-morrow.” And he prepared to resume his march!

But that was not what I wanted. I replied that he was mistaken. The contradiction stopped him at once; he turned to me to prove that I was wrong, and we were off again.

Such is a sample of our intercourse; the flower of gallantry is certainly lacking, but I find great pleasure in it. Further, nothing vexes me, nothing wounds me, and my angry feelings are so quickly appeased that in the evening, when I am back in my own room, and I hunt in the ashes for a smoldering spark of bitterness, all my remembrances of the day burst up like fire-works, and rockets of joy and pleasure come instead.

Still, I gain nothing—I feel it. But, in the veiled and distant future, I dream of revenge, and I laugh to myself at the prospect.

Oh, M. de Civreuse, the day when you fall at my feet, how I will leave you there, and how you will regret the lost time while you anxiously wait for the smiles you might have now!

Often, however, he speaks to me of my life at Er-lange, of my convent, of my aunt. Yesterday I even thought he was going to question me about my studies—a little examination in history and geography. I should certainly not have shone in it.

In my turn, I question him about his journey. What

fine things he will say and do! To go everywhere that fancy takes him; to ask nobody's advice; to hunt elephants as easily as here sparrows are taken with birdlime; to climb mountains on the top of which one has one's head above the clouds and one's feet hidden in them; to row on the Ganges, a great sacred river—which would be like a river of holy water with us—where sometimes one meets crocodiles as long as boats, and sometimes dead Indians who float down with the current to go to paradise, for it is the road, it appears, and that the manner of burial there! To travel in a palanquin, and to find every morning, in the shells of the oysters one is eating for breakfast, pearls enough for a necklace—what a dream, what a life!

I had only one cry in hearing about it, a silent cry, be it understood: "Oh! take me with you! take me with you! As servant, as page, as cook, or as companion, as you will! I would be so easy to get on with, so brave, daring, would bear fatigue, and so happy to dine off a jackal!" But how could I say all this?

Seeing me listening with rapt attention, my eyes shining with enthusiasm, and my hands clasped in my emotion—

"All this seems very fine to you, does it not?" he said, with the manner he usually has when I am excited.

Really, to see and hear him, one would think he had lived at least two or three lives, and that his fourth attempt wearies him, like an old book that one knows by heart. He says to himself, "On such a page I shall find this thing, on another that," and this is the cause of his

indifference about everything: he has lost the pleasure of the unforeseen. This is the only explanation I can find for his morose temper, and sometimes I want to ask him, "Did you do this, and did you think that, in your first life?" But he would doubtless think I am crazy, so I keep my little observations to myself, and content myself with saying in all sincerity how much I envy him, and how tempting his life of adventure seems to me.

"Bah! you would soon tire of it," he said, shrugging his shoulders: "there are neither dolls nor playthings in those countries."

Tire of it! I know I should find it delightful; and, besides, have I any playthings here? If M. de Civreuse will be kind enough to show them to me, I shall be much obliged to him.

I, who have always loved the impossible, who in my cradle wanted the gilt arrow that held my curtains, because it was inaccessible to me, and who ever since have continued to long for all the arrows out of my reach!

"But you do not know what I care for," I said to M. Pierre; "I want all I can not reach, and I admire all that I can not do."

"Like the Malays of Timor," he said, looking at me curiously, "who adore crocodiles because, they remark, very judiciously, 'A crocodile swallows a man, but a man can not swallow a crocodile'!"

I did not answer. The reasoning does not seem so nonsensical; these Malays appear to me to be logical.

When one does not love through preference, it is something to venerate from fear, and if I knew how to make some one say that he adored me—even through fear of being eaten up—how willingly would I become a Malay!

Pierre to Jacques.

My friend, she is clever, there is no denying it; but her excitability and her ardor frighten me.

Would you like a squib, which, instead of exploding among the stars, danced perpetually before your eyes? For my own part, it makes me nervous. Only, to be just, the squib has fine colors and bold curves.

This means that we have regular conversations, and that she is not in the least timid with me. A patriarch does not count, you understand.

But let us begin with my small vanities, if you will. The wound turns out better than I feared. The scar goes along under the hair, and comes down to the eyebrows with a determined look. It can not be helped. I might have got it at Malakof, hence it brings no reproach.

The good doctor himself looked at me with pride—an artist's vanity, which is very excusable. Then he called everybody to come and see how smoothly and exactly he had closed the wound.

Benoite complimented me in her own way with her usual frankness. "It was better before, that is sure, but it is a good piece of mending all the same!" And

Mademoiselle Colette nearly did me the honor of showing sentiment about it.

She leaned over to look, whiter than her cambric handkerchief, and, as I raised my eyebrows to show her my agility—

“Why, it moves!” she cried, horrified, turning toward the doctor.

“What?” he asked. “The skin of the forehead? I hope so; yours does too.”

She scowled, and tried it in every direction so as to be sure; then, tranquillized, she approached, and comparing my two eyes, the one just uncovered with the other:

“It is exactly like it,” she sighed in a low voice. And I was forced to conclude that, up to the present, she had supposed me cross-eyed, or that I had but one.

When the excitement was over, the doctor left; Benoîte returned to her furnaces, which are emphatically such, for at Erlange the cooking is done on the hearth with a tripod, in our fathers’ fashion; and Mademoiselle Colette and I were left alone together as usual.



You could never believe the amount of talking we have done for the last four days, and my discoveries about my young companion are many. To begin with, Jacques, be shocked if you like, but I have been forced to the conclusion that she is absolutely ignorant—a veritable little savage. Only,

you would lose your time if you attempted to pity her for it, and your sympathy would be superfluous, for she accepts the fact with the most amiable philosophy, and makes a sort of mixture of all her knowledge, which has neither head nor tail, and this appears to satisfy her perfectly. Yet she has spent two years in one of the best convents of Paris ; but we are great fools, you and I, if we think that study is the occupation in such places.

In the different departments the interests vary. From dolls they go on to hoops, from hoops to story-books, from story-books to society, the polka, or a waltz, learned on the close-cut grass of the shrubberies, when the teachers are not looking. But study is only an accessory—the fifth wheel of the carriage.

Besides, Mademoiselle d'Erlange has her ideas about it, which she explained to me with extreme clearness. She has never been able to remember anything which did not concern people or things she liked. All this she knows perfectly ; as for the rest—it is nothing. This is her system.

Take as an example her history of France ; it is very simple. She begins it at Charlemagne, “a great man who interests her,” and she knows all about him—the ball he holds in his hand, his sword, his big foot, and especially his nephew Roland. From him she jumps to Henri IV, her great passion. She knows all his witty sayings, adores his profile and his impetuosity, but gets a little confused in the story of the abjuration and conquest. As long as France belonged to him from the cradle, what need had he to fight about it? Her history

stops at Napoleon—the last personage she cares for. Since then, have we been awake or asleep? She hardly knows, and, until another great man appears, she does not mean to think about it. The poor child is likely to wait a long time, to judge from present appearances. What do you think?

Between times she has a mild interest in Bayard, Duguesclin, Joan of Arc, and in general all the fighters. They serve for breaks in her great interregnums, and I am not quite sure that she does not crown one or the other of them from time to time.

You can understand the process, there is nothing easier; and it is not merely a theory. She applies it bravely to everything. Thus, in geography she does not hesitate to avow her national antipathies, which are numerous.

She dislikes England and the English, for instance. On her map the Channel is marked with a red line, which Mademoiselle d'Erlange never crosses. As you might imagine, the Rhine is inexorably barred; and, as the Italians please her no better than the English, the same fatal mark passes over the peaks of the Alps. On the other hand, she would go to Russia to interest herself in the Slavs, and I believe she is ignorant of more than one peculiarity of the French soil.

If you were to tell her that Parnassus is a hill opposite Montmartre, she would not be in the least astonished; and she mixes up departments, cities, railroads, and rivers with the most easy good-nature.

If you add to this the mass of varied knowledge she

has picked up, no one can tell how, a good deal of poetry, some political ideas, anecdotes of the time of King William, a way of adding up figures which would not be allowed in even a cobbler's apprentice, wonderful self-possession, and an extreme quickness of apprehension, you have a whole which would give a schoolmaster the jaundice, but which would delight an imaginative man.

Being neither the one nor the other, I look on and enjoy, reposing in my seat in the balcony stalls, and do not forget to give you from time to time the other end of the telephone—lucky fellow that you are!

With no knowledge of real life, and in love with the unattainable, if I were to propose to her to-morrow to set off for India in my suite, it is ten to one that she would accept. I say this without the least conceit, for it is evident that I should count for nothing in the affair. But to see crocodiles, rattlesnakes, and other nice things, just think of the pleasure! She would swim all the way, to have it.

It is astonishing to find the same longing for emotions and adventure in all women. They prize them more than anything else, but they would be mortally afraid if they realized their cravings.

Can you picture to yourself Mademoiselle Colette before the jaws of an alligator yawning as he looked at her? The poor child would run away—if her legs were left to her—with frightful cries. But at the present moment she can conceive no happiness equal to that of having a close view of these great saurians, which sob in

the evening in the plaintive tone of infants in the cradle, as she has been told, but which, when they like, if I am well informed, can swallow their man as if they had cut at least their second teeth.

I try to disenchant her ; she is determined to see the bright side, and she has so much blue on her pallet that I despair of finding a place for my spots of black. You declare that it is a pity and an abomination to destroy this dreamer's illusions. And why are you not willing that I should teach the child that water drowns and fire burns? She is capable of not suspecting it, and of putting in her hand to try. Do not worry : she loses neither sleep nor appetite in listening to my skeptical preaching, and I should like you to see her lunch ; it is a comforting spectacle.

At four o'clock, at the first stroke of the clock—a crazy old thing that goes as it likes, with the greatest contempt for exactitude, and which Mademoiselle Colette herself winds up every fortnight in the towers of the château—she gets up and disappears in haste. Whether in the middle of a phrase, with a motion half-finished, or lost in the exploration of her ruins, she goes at once, and everything else has to stop. The shipwrecked sailors of the *Méduse* would not have gone more eagerly in pursuit of food.

Five minutes previously she was not thinking of it, but at four o'clock she feels faint, seized with a hunger-fit, and acts as if, the hand past the quarter, all would be lost.

The first days I waited for her return, surprised and

anxious, thinking that some catastrophe must have been the motive of her flight; but at the end of fifteen minutes she came back with her light step, a corner of her dress held up to contain her provisions, and, reseating herself while eating her repast—and what a repast!—resumed the conversation where she had left it off.

Regularly, I say it to her praise, she offers to share the meal with me, but she gets through the whole so easily, that I should have scruples about accepting, and I watch her cracking nuts with her teeth like a Nuremberg toy, and eating dried prunes which resemble melted India-rubber, or a kind of soft pasty cake, which draws out as if in long white tongues.

I have only once accepted her polite offer. She had taken out of the folds of her dress five red apples besides an enormous piece of bread. Five apples! Can you understand these young girls' digestions—incapable of getting through a good underdone beefsteak, and reducing five apples in some minutes?

I had refused her first offer, and without insisting she went to work. She conscientiously polished each apple with her woolen dress before eating it, rubbing it over and over again, and only setting teeth to it when her black eyes were reflected in the shining mirror of its skin. I watched her, amused at what she was doing, interested in the spots which resisted, and so much occupied with her that at the third apple she perceived it. Was there a desire in my look, or did she only think so? I do not know, but suddenly stretching out her hand—

"I have five to-day ; really you could take one," she said ; and, as I did not reply, overpowered with this munificence—

"I will make it shine for you," she added ; and with the same corner of her drapery, with an energy that brought the blood to her face, she obtained the proper polish on the apple, and held it out to me.

Of course I ate it with an amount of gratitude proportioned to the benefit, but this symbolic fruit made me anxious, and I expected to see the serpent appear from under the furniture. Happily, there was none—at least in appearance.

This reminds me of a physiological idea of *Made-moiselle Colette's* which will amuse you, I am sure, and complete the description of her scientific attainments.

It was yesterday, at the fateful hour of which we have been speaking. On the stroke of the hour she had gone, and the quarter had struck before she returned. It was a perfect anomaly ; fifteen minutes to compose her feast ! What would she bring back this time ? I watched the door. Five minutes later she returned with both hands full, and walking with as much dignity as though she were carrying a relic. For an instant I thought she might be bringing back her *Saint Joseph* with her, and that they were reconciled, but it was nothing like that. The object of so much care was a piece of hot bread which smoked in her fingers—a hunch, as they say here—nearly the size of a quarter of a loaf. In the middle of the soft paste a hollow had

been made, and was filled with thick cream, which as it melted gave out a delicious odor.

She gave a sigh of relief as she sat down, shook her head with a confidential air, and, showing me the object, said in a low voice with an expressive gesture:

"It burns!" Then, without waiting, she attacked the fabulous bread, biting and blowing by turns.

"But," I could not help saying, "you are never going to eat all that?"

"Yes. Why not? It is excellent."

"Perhaps. But it is as heavy as lead. It will disagree with your stomach."

"My stomach!" she repeated in a tone of disdain, "what do you suppose it can matter to my stomach?" And she threw herself back to laugh at her ease over the idea that half a pound of hot dough could inconvenience her stomach.

"It may give it trouble to digest," I quietly replied. Then, as she opened her big eyes, I reflected that she probably did not know what I was talking about, and calling to my aid the classical definition of my childhood—

"The stomach," I resumed in a didactic tone, "is a sort of pocket shaped like a bagpipe. Its distended extremity is placed on the left side, and above—"



"Oh, very well," she interrupted, "it is not in the least like that, as I understand it!"

And as the bread was decidedly too hot, she put it in her lap, and, requiring no urging, went on:

"This is how I think it: I imagine a little, old man, very, very small, bent over, in a brown coat, with a wig and queue, and a gold-headed cane, who is always going and coming in a little room. In the middle of it is a big chimney, down which come all the things that are sent him, and he rushes to it whenever there is an arrival. He leans down, sorts them out, looks, rubs his hands when what he receives seems good to him, shrugs his shoulders and gets angry when it is bad. 'The fools! what have they sent me?' he grumbles; 'what do they expect me to do with that?' And he pushes it with his foot into a corner, where useless things are put, where perhaps my hot bread will go—it is possible—but that is all. As for a pocket and a bagpipe, I have never heard of such a thing, and I do not want to be worried about it. My little old man is enough for my work; we understand each other perfectly, and if he scowls a little on the days when I eat green apples, he is at least polite enough not to make any remarks. Why should I change?"

The bread had stopped smoking, the crust cracked as it cooled, and the cream smelt better than ever. Mademoiselle Colette took the cake delicately in her fingers, and finished her luncheon without a word, sure that she had convinced me of the existence of her little man. Such is her logic.

But in hearing her tell of her past life, one may understand her peculiarities! Yesterday I questioned her on her childhood, trying to find the trace of a governess, professor, or any other director, and, as I could find nothing resembling one—

“But who brought you up?” I asked at last.

“Nobody!” she replied. “I came up in my own way as best I could! Thank Goodness, I had that compensation for my solitude!”

And she made a gesture with her hand, to indicate something growing as it likes.

Can you imagine this situation—this young girl springing up as wild oats do, between her dog and her old nurse who is even more her slave than the dog, and with twenty-four hours every day to get into any scrapes she chooses! I can now understand the incident to which I am indebted for the pleasure of her acquaintance: to pass from thought to action, it is only necessary for her to have the material time necessary for the accomplishment of her fancy. She knows no other condition.

There are, however, in this existence melancholy hours which she describes without reserve, and the aunt of whom I have told you—a frightful old woman—has just given me a specimen of her ill-humor. She has made an attack upon us from which our little society has hardly yet recovered, and the traces of which will remain.

About two hours ago I was watching “One,” who was executing all his best tricks under the direction of

Mademoiselle Colette, who did not disdain to take part from time to time in the exercise, when the door opened suddenly and a woman entered. Tall, dry, bony, ugly enough to take the rôle of an ogress, if she chose, she announced herself in a voice which instantly brought her young niece to her feet, and made the dog place himself in front of his mistress, showing his teeth, as if to protect her.

"Sir! I am Mademoiselle d'Epine," she said to me.

"Very well named,"* I said to myself; but aloud, "Mademoiselle, I have the honor to present my respects to you."

But what did she care for my respects?

"A month ago," she continued, "you arrived in my house, coming from nobody knows where; and, as I have thought that you must be now at about the end of your visit, I wished to see you once before your departure."

"Arrived" seemed to me curious, and "visit" more peculiar still, and you will agree that it would be impossible to put a man more decidedly out of doors; but, before I could answer, Mademoiselle d'Erlange had recovered herself.

"Say rather in *our* house," she exclaimed; "and even in *my* house, for M. de Civreuse is in my wing, as you know very well. And as for the way in which he came, which you seem to have forgotten, I will refresh your memory.

"I wounded him in the head by throwing something

* *Épine*, a thorn.

out as he was passing by, certainly not thinking of us. Benoit and I carried him into the kitchen half-dead. Then, while she was preparing this room, and I was watching him down below, I swore, on my knees by his side, to take care of him, to cure him, and to obtain his pardon. Do you now remember these things? I told you all once before."

"I only remember this," she replied, angrily, going toward the young girl, "that once before I protested against your playing the part of sick-nurse, which you have undertaken in an inexcusable manner, and that this time I will find a way to force you to relinquish it."

"Why did you not take it upon yourself?" returned Mademoiselle Colette; "there is more than one place by the bed, I suppose."

"A bed which I shall most certainly have left by this evening, mademoiselle," I returned, "and which I should never have consented to occupy a single instant if I had been even more than half-dead, or had in the least suspected that I was received against the wishes of any one here!"

I was beside myself. The most insolent things came to my lips, and I really do not know what kept me from jumping up instantly. Certainly it was not the presence of this woman, and, if she had been alone, I am sure I should have revenged myself by shocking her modesty by that unexpected spectacle. But she was not alone.

Besides, she did not answer my protestations by a single word; but, turning to her niece, said:

"You will be forced to obedience by some one wiser than you are."

Then, judging that she had accomplished her purpose, she turned toward the door with her long, gawky step, as a dismasted ship past usefulness is drawn up on the beach, knocking against every rock.

But she was not half-way there when a fourth person appeared on the scene; it was my doctor, who darted in like an arrow, with knit brow and compressed lips, and seized her brusquely by the arm.

"Who speaks of obedience in a sick-room when the doctor is not there?" he said, rudely.

He had been listening behind the door, and did not conceal it.

"You," he said, turning to Mademoiselle Colette, "you are in your proper place here. Do not stir. I put you here, I keep you here, and consider it my business.

"As for you, sir," he said to me, "I suppose you have not forgotten our first conversation; you know my views on the responsibility I take. I have your word, and you will not leave Erlange until I give the permission."

"As for you, Mademoiselle," he added, looking at the old maid, whom he still held by the arm, "I have the honor of offering you my arm to take you back to your room, and on the way I will give you some information about fractures, the effects of which you do not seem to understand, and which will interest you, I am sure."

Dragging off Mademoiselle d'Epine utterly confounded, on whom he smiled placidly, he took her down the whole length of the room. He stopped on the threshold.

"And take particular notice," said he, turning and looking at us, "that Mademoiselle d'Erlange was mistaken by one half just now. It is not one wing which is hers, but the entire château, ruins and all." Then they went out.



To say that I was raging internally would be feeble ; I could not keep from revengeful gestures, and I longed to be able to make some one suffer. But in spite of the malice of my adversary, as she claimed to belong to the gentler sex she was out of my reach ; and yet I have seen grenadiers who would gladly pass for beaus if they could have her broad shoulders. Besides, I remembered Mademoiselle Colette ; the attack on her had been still worse.

I turned toward her, expecting to find her in tears ; but she was far from that. With flashing eyes and head erect, she seemed a Bellona in anger.

"A wicked woman ! a wicked woman !" she cried, stamping her foot on the ground.

Then suddenly throwing herself into an arm-chair—

"I have lived nearly eighteen years with her!" she burst forth.

"Is she always like this?" I asked her.

"Always."

"But what is the matter with her?"

"Who knows?" she replied, shaking her head. "Sour grapes, perhaps. I think there are some women who grow up ill-tempered, as there is some grass full of nettles. She evidently belongs to the nettles."

"But when I was not here, why was she generally cross with you?"

She did not answer, looking at me with a hesitating air, the shadow of a smile lifting the corner of her lip, while she mechanically pulled at her dog's long hair. I looked at her, waiting for her to speak, and, as I looked, I was so struck with the contrast between this charming face and the hard, broad mask of the woman who had just left us, that, without thinking, I exclaimed:

"Is it because you are eighteen, and she—?"

The smile deepened, and Mademoiselle d'Erlange, looking at me through her eyelashes, said:

"She was eighteen once, but—" She was silent again, lowering her eyelashes completely, so that they beat on her pink cheeks like a lace fan. Embarrassment is very rare with her, but is becoming, and without hesitation I put her thoughts into words:

"She was eighteen once, of course; but her spring had not the flowers of yours: that is it."

How I allowed myself to be drawn into such a madrigal, the devil only knows! But, as Mademoiselle Co-

lette had bravely defended me just now, she deserved that I should come to her aid in my turn. She took it as a simple statement of fact, began to laugh gayly, and raised her eyebrows with a little gesture that signified, "Yes, you are right this time!" Then, without transition, her confidence completely restored, she let flow the current of her recollections, relating episodes of her childhood which concerned her aunt, telling how frightened she used to be at her as a child; the whole without bitterness, but with a comic and malicious fancy which gave a touch of life and burlesque relief to the portrait of her very peculiar guardian. Egotism and jealousy are the two dominant qualities of this woman, and I am going to tell you a trait that reveals her.

Naturally very fond of good eating, she manages so that the limited resources of the house shall never interfere with her requirements; but the bill of fare, generally carefully prepared, is never better than on fast-days. On these mornings some delicate little dish is prepared, and as they sit down to table Mademoiselle d'Epine says to her niece:

"My stomach does not bear fasting, Colette; you will have to fast for us both."

And the niece eats her sardines or her vegetables, accompanied by the odor of the squabs eaten by her aunt, who piously offers Heaven this compromise, praying to have the substitution accepted.

I hope that some day in purgatory, when her accounts are made up, she will find that her schemes were not wise; but purgatory is far off, and until then who can

rescue this child from her clutches, and, above all, who will give her back her past years, and supply the affectionate care and the education which she has not received?

I can tell you, Jacques, a sequestration is going on here, and that is what this woman wants.

The roast chickens which she refuses to give her niece, the soft covers, and the soft bed, all the comforts which she reserves for herself alone, are nothing; but she intends to imprison the girl morally between four walls, and to keep her spirit and her youth so closely guarded that no one shall guess the life that is crushed under the ruins.

What would you call this crime, if you deny that it is imprisonment, and how would you punish it?

For my part, I intend to circumvent her, and without delay. The day after I leave here I will begin the work. If I have to make an outcry through the press, assemble a family council, or call in the aid of the police, I will succeed, and the door of this cave shall be thrown open. To whom can belong the part of righter of wrongs, if not to those who despise the world and know it as it is?

In exchange for her watchings and the care she has taken of me, Mademoiselle Colette shall have her liberty. I will open the door of her cage. By all that is sacred, Jacques—you hear?—I swear it!

Half an hour later the doctor came back, and you can imagine the discussion.

“Doctor, I intend to leave.”

“Do not let us go back to that, I beg.”

"Give me back my promise."

"Most certainly not. You are at the most difficult and delicate stage; do not spoil such a beautiful fracture for me."

"It is impossible for me to stay here after the scene we have just had; you must see that."

"I tell you that woman is crazy. Shall I sign a paper committing her to Charenton, so as to put your mind at rest?"

And as I insisted—

"Sir," he said, coolly, "my age and character are sufficient for me to assume the responsibility of my acts; will you have the goodness to send me any persons who have any fault to find with them—" And he turned his back, while Mademoiselle Colette kept on saying:

"But since you are in my house! But since you have been told that you are in my house!"

The poor little thing saw no further in it than that.

Finally, the doctor promised on his honor to let me go in ten days, and on my side I have promised not to attempt to escape before that time. But all the same, I am exasperated. It is useless talking, the position is false. Every time the door creaks I tremble like a runaway school-boy, and I would like to send Mademoiselle d'Erlange about her business. Only, she sees no harm in it. It was a scene, that is all; she has witnessed many others, and she continues her usual life in perfect composure.

April 20th.

It is all over—the good days are ending ; and in spite of all I can do now, without knowing how or why, all my reveries end in tears.

It is without wishing it, and even without perceiving it. I seat myself as I used to do on my divan, I think of the same things, and what pleased me yesterday, what made me laugh so gayly that I had to bury my head in the cushions for fear some one would hear me, makes me sad now. I still bury my head in the same place, but when I take it up the stuff is moist, and it is only then that I perceive that I have wept.

What a frightful scene my aunt made, and how it wounded me ! I was so afraid that M. Pierre would be angry !

The doctor happily arranged it all ; but he remains a little constrained, a little embarrassed. Perhaps he is vexed with us in spite of all, and that makes me so sorry !

Only one week more to stay here ! I should not have thought he could have been cured so quickly ; it is too short ! That is to say, it is not the illness which is too short, it is the stay. I thought he would be much longer at Erlange, and above all— Well, I did not think it would end in this way. Now it is over, nobody will care for Colette ; when he has passed the door, he will not think of her any more, and she will be alone, much more lonely than before, as the darkness is blacker in a place which has been light, and from which the light has been taken away.

Very softly this tenacious folly which I have in me hopes still. Why and what? I can not say, but I feel there is a change coming—I am afraid it is far off!

At least, M. de Civreuse will suspect nothing. With him I am gayer than ever, and without effort. It is so nice in that big room!—I tell the whole truth only to my confidants, my cushion and my diary, and when I have finished with the first, I carry it to the fire and dry it, and I take the second. The margins are quite spoiled; without thinking, I write, two initials, always the same, lengthwise, across, interlaced, separate, and just now I put his whole name on my left hand—a letter on every nail, and two on the last, the thumb.

It was funny, and at first I laughed; then came this stupid little tear, and the ink was blotted.—And so everything is blotted out.

But yesterday I chose my ground better. I ran to the end of the park, and on the bark of a great pine-tree, the one near which I used to dream and which I climbed last autumn to watch for adventures, with my little dagger I cut the name which occupies my thoughts. There is no other way of telling a tree what one thinks, and I was glad to tell it.



When I came in, M. Pierre noticed my damp dress and wet shoes.

"Have you been out?" he asked.

And I answered, "Yes, I took a walk."

If he knew what walk!

Pierre to Jacques.

"My friend, you are an idiot."

Why does the beginning of the letter which Henri IV wrote quite three hundred years ago to his faithful Sully come to mind to-day? Analogy, probably, and because on this point at least you resemble this morning that model of ministers.

Seriously, Jacques, this time your letter made me angry. I have arrived at the age of reason, I suppose, and I know what I feel and what I want, and your witticisms have no sense in them.

My pulse is excellent, my head clear, and my heart light, whatever you may say, and I have no hidden object in the efforts that I am about to make for the good of my young hostess.

"You are mixing yourself up in things which do not concern you; you are drawing down on yourself millions of annoyances, and risk being put in your place by the notary who will politely send you about your business, and all for a person who is utterly indifferent to you! How probable it all is, and how can you expect me to believe that, especially when I know that

the person in question is a young and beautiful creature! Be frank, confess, and marry her: it is much simpler."

My poor Jacques, you settle things with a club, as one beats down nuts; your "much simpler" is heroic, even more so than you suspect.

I do not work for reward, my friend; it is for honor, for the love of art, like a knight of old, and you must confess that if all those brave paladins, who formerly defended the widow and the orphan, had thought themselves forced, or even authorized, to marry all the prisoners whom they delivered in a year, each one would have possessed a harem, and morality would have swept away the whole within six months.

Remember that I am only just beginning my journey around the world, and do not make a chimney-piece of my sword at the first stage; it dances in its scabbard at the thought of all the fine things it is to accomplish, and the idea of repose by the fireside is horrible! If this little blonde seems of such inestimable value to you, why do you not come and take up the work yourself?

I can tell you in confidence, if you want to know, that Mademoiselle Colette is in love with you already. She is sure of it, she has told me; and if I had not been afraid of one of your usual extravagances, I should have told you so before. Now you know. Be quick, and I will introduce you.

And now, let us leave this subject, I beg you, for it irritates me. I have hardly a week more to spend

here. Do not let me play that excellent doctor false, and leave some fine evening, sick of the whole subject; and if you are not seeking a quarrel with me, for Heaven's sake leave me in peace, and cease your sentimental forecasts!

I do not say but that a man of enthusiastic temperament, an untried heart, and some youthful illusions, might be affected here—the strange surroundings, the intimacy, those beautiful eyes!

But it is not my fault, Jaques, if I am no longer twenty—to-morrow there will be just nine years since that was the case; and there are two things one can never have back: youth and illusions. If you can give them back to me, on the word of a disenchanted man, I will fall at her feet.

Our last days pass very pleasantly. Mademoiselle d'Erlange is gayer than ever, and no constraint is possible near her.

I confess it to you in private, this unconcernedness and these good spirits surprise me a little.

Certainly I am neither a fool nor a lady-killer. I appreciate myself at my real value, but I am perhaps worth a little emotion, and I remember a brilliant circle where I held my own. Doubtless Paris demands less than Erlange.

Remark, if you please, that I am delighted that it is so; the contrary would have embarrassed me, saddened me, filled me with remorse, and I only speak of it because I write everything. But you must acknowledge that it is singular that a young girl who is alone, who

finds her life tiresome, and who suddenly sees her first romance appear in the shape of a young man, tolerably good-looking, receives it thus; we may throw to the winds the legend which makes young girls' hearts of inflammable stuff. Besides, I am ready to believe that Mademoiselle d'Erlange's exuberant spirits serve to relieve her, and that so many outward manifestations leave her inner thoughts in a state of great placidity; her heart may even be a little hard—a fact easily accounted for by her childhood, so devoid of tenderness and joy.

However it may be, all is for the best, and we employ our last afternoons over the noble game of checkers.

They do not go on without some tempests, which disturb the sittings, for Mademoiselle Colette does not like to be beaten; and after the first lessons, when I thought I ought to favor her, I have gone back to my usual style of playing, and now beat her five times out of six.

Her patience, which is not great, is quickly exhausted under these conditions, and she gets as angry as a cat. She first gets red, scowls a little, drums nervously on the table, and finally, when the case seems to her hopeless, she sweeps all the checkers together with her hand. I then lean back majestically on my cushions and contemplate the beams of the ceiling, until she gives in, which is never long. She replaces the men, pushes the board toward me, and mutters:

"It was really too bad!" Then, convinced that this

explains everything, she holds out her closed hands toward me to draw, so as to see which is to begin, and everything goes on in the same order.

Invariably, in the beginning, I propose to give her some men, and also invariably she refuses with an air of offended dignity, evidently considering her sweeping off the board much more regular than this favor, and insisting passionately at the beginning of each game that I shall play with her as I would with anybody else, seriously and without helping her.

I, the slave of orders, obey, and in five minutes more she is stamping her foot: it is logical.

Just now we were engaged in a skirmish; I saw her getting herself in a scrape, and twice running, without meaning to do so, I swept off four victims at a blow. You may fancy her state of mind: she bit her under lip so that the blood receded, and she looked over the board with the despairing glance of a swimmer who has lost footing.

Prudently I drew back my fingers, foreseeing some formidable blow; but things changed, her brow suddenly cleared, her lip resumed its natural appearance, and, with her fingers on one of the men, she conducted it obliquely across the board, pushing off such of my men as were in her way, without violence, and without appearing to know that she was going against the rules.

At the edge she stopped, and said, very gravely:

“Your turn!”

“What do you mean by my turn? What are you doing?” I asked.

"Well," she replied with superb calm, "I am going to make a queen. I should never get there as we were going, so I have taken another way."

In everything there is this same contempt for barriers and rules; this untutored nature would not be out of place in a tribe of wild Indians. I can imagine her in her tent, with feathers in her hair, a string of flowers around her shoulders, rivaling the wild goats in her capers, and baptized by the enthusiastic tribe as "Singing Bird" or "Flying Arrow."

In the mean while, Flying Arrow performs her duties as mistress of the house, and does her best to amuse me.

For a week I have been able to get up. Aided by Benoite, whose strong shoulder serves me as a cane, I reach an arm-chair placed near a window, I extend my leg in its splints in another chair in front of me, and, with Mademoiselle Colette as a guide, I learn to know the court and the principal points of the château. "There," she says, "is the library, there the dining-room, there the chapel, and there"—showing me the ruins this time—"were the drawing-rooms, a large guard-room, an oratory, and numerous galleries."



The whole—ruins and remaining portions—is superb; it is pure Louis XIII style, both elegant and severe; and there is sculpture which makes me dream, and on which I sincerely compliment the châtelaine of the place, who criticises and appreciates it with her usual originality.

When I tell you that I have made the acquaintance of Françoise, the third of Mademoiselle Colette's attachments, you will agree with me that I know all that is necessary, and that I can leave Erlange.

Yesterday was a superb day, dry and bright; one side of the window was open, in spite of the keen air, and I was breathing it with delight, when I saw my young nurse cross the court. She looked up as she passed and made a little sign to me with her hand, and ran to the door of the servants' quarters which opens on the court.

"I want to show you Françoise," she cried.

She came out in a moment with a big, short-winded, half-blind animal, with a large body, huge neck, four long, thin legs, and a whitey-yellow coat.

Utterly indifferent to this ugliness, she talked to the beast, patted her, stuffed her with sugar and bread, and all so quickly that the poor old mare could not eat what was given her. When she had ended—

"She does not trot badly—you shall see," she called to me.

She threw a blanket upon her, dragged her to the stone steps, and sprang on her back like a fairy, and, exciting her with her voice, made her start on a trot.

The animal stumbled on all the stones, she threw up her big head in fear, and with her smoking nostrils she resembled the beast in the Apocalypse, carrying off some unhappy spirit on its uncertain course.

"That is a game at which you may break your neck!" I cried to Mademoiselle d'Erlange.

"Bah!" she replied; "we know each other very well."

At the tenth round she let herself slide down to the ground so quickly that I thought she had fallen, and took her friend back with the same protestations of tenderness that she had lavished on her as she brought her out.

This is how she speaks to animals, and I am not surprised that she has nothing left for men—she gives them her whole heart.

In all probability I shall write to you the next time from the village. I shall only remain there long enough to pay a visit of thanks to my hostesses, to see my good doctor, and to inform you of my plans.

Turn the page, for the adventure is over, and I shall probably see you soon. I have missed so many steamers already that I am tempted to let still another sail without me, so as to go and see you in your country home.

April 28th.

All is over. M. de Civreuse went yesterday, and I feel lost here.

It is true I have known Erlange empty and silent

before, and I have been used to hearing my steps resound in the halls, and my voice against the wood-work, but all is changed now.

It was only tediousness before; now it is sadness, and the things weigh differently.

From time to time I try to be brave, and play a little comedy to myself. I put things in order, I go and come, and hum gay little airs; then I sit down beside my dog, I take his head on my knees, and I talk to him as I used to; only, even with him, I detect myself in saying what is not true.

"Six weeks to mend a broken leg, 'One,' is enormous," I said to him just now, "and we would never have thought it could last so long, would we?"

This is not true—it is not true at all, for I counted on twice as long, at least for the present, and on always for later.

Benoîte looks at me uneasily. She is not free from the suspicion, or at least fear, of a little sentiment, and she would willingly keep me by her; but that is what I do not want, so I pretend that the carrying back of my belongings occupies me, and escape.

In reality, I do nothing at all, and I have left everything as it was yesterday, for I dare not return to my old room. There are so many associations in every corner that they overpower me when I go in, and I could not sleep there for the present. I should be afraid that all the ghosts would find out my secret, and go and tell it to M. Pierre, who would laugh over it perhaps, and I want to come here only to dream. In the library I

weep, I regret, I get angry, I do as I like; then, when I am myself again, it is my hour for recreation. I take the well-known way, I sit down in my usual place, I look at the empty bed, the arm-chair near the window, with no one in it, and I remember!

Often, too, I get angry. After all, what did this man come here for? Why has he found a place in my head and heart, since he wants nothing from me? And what power is it which sends thus a beginning of happiness, just what is needed for happiness, which lets you appreciate it, look well at it, and which snatches it away at the very moment when you close your hand, thinking to hold it?

Is this what is called Providence?

Still, one must be just; M. de Civreuse did nothing to attract me, and I even think it was his coldness which struck and won me.

Gloomy as he was, he sometimes smiled, and there is a special charm in the smile of those who are habitually cold. It is like the winter sun, or like the aloe-flower of which M. Pierre told me, which blossoms but once in a hundred years, and whose rarity gives it its value. Why should I have been taken by so rare a flower?

Our last day was the best of all, and I am not sure that even he did not feel a very little emotion.

When I came in at my usual hour in the morning, I found near his arm-chair a table on which were paper, a box of paints, and a bundle of brushes and pencils. Benoit gave him a glass, and as soon as she had gone out—

"Would you be willing," he said, speaking quickly, "to allow me to sketch your portrait in my album? I have just done this side of the château, but my remembrance of Erlange would be very incomplete if my sick-nurse was not on the first page."

Of course I answered yes, and I drew near to see what he held, while I asked:

"How shall I place myself—standing, sitting, in profile, or front face?" And at the same time I tried all the positions.

He began to laugh, and, after reflecting a moment—

"If you would be good enough to seat yourself in the large arm-chair beside the fireplace, as you were the first night when I awoke here, I would be obliged," he said.

"But without the dress, I suppose."

"Without the dress, unfortunately."

"Unfortunately? Shall I go and put it on?"

"Oh, I would not dare—"

"But it will only take a second—"

And I was gone before he had finished his phrase.

As I had said, I came back in an instant. Only, the skirt of the unknown ancestress is too long for me; it was in vain that I held it up with both hands, my feet caught in the hem, so that I came in stumbling, and when at last I let go of it so as to make a sweeping courtesy to M. de Civreuse, it happened that in going toward the fireplace I fell heavily on my knees.

M. Pierre gave an exclamation, a sort of cry which



He went on and on, raising his eyes to me every moment.

certainly pleased me, and made a motion as of hastily rising.

"And your knee!" I cried. "Do not move." Then I quickly recovered my feet and seated myself in the arm-chair. But he was uneasy.

"You are sure you are not hurt?" he said. "What an absurd idea of mine it was to make you put it on! Really, you have nothing the matter with you?"

I answered no, my heart beating a little—not from my fall, but for the anxious tone in the voice that questioned me; and it was a full quarter of an hour, after I had had time to recover, before he began to work.

He went on and on, raising his eyes to me every moment, looking at me with a persistence that was quite embarrassing, and making me rest—that is to say, move about—every quarter of an hour. Luncheon interrupted us, but at two o'clock the sketch was finished. Then he called me to him, and I could not help exclaiming when I saw the paper he held out to me:

"It is I! Oh, but how pretty it is!"

The fact is, the pink little lady who smiled at me from the arm-chair beside the large dark chimney-piece, the fire-dogs showing clearly against the carving of the wood-work, was a real picture, and I could not help admiring it.

"Which is pretty?" M. de Civreuse asked, sarcastically; "you or the sketch?"

"The portrait, of course!"

He looked at me a moment, smiling, then, in a very different tone from the one I was acquainted with, said:

"The portrait is you, for unfortunately the likeness is good. There is nothing to change in your exclamation."

I was silent; it is perhaps the second time that I have heard a word of praise from his lips, and it moved me more than I could have wished. Still, I desired very, very much to have, as he had, a souvenir of the charming time that was slipping away from me, and I tried nervously to think of what I could say or do.

"And what if I sketched your portrait?" I began, jokingly.

"Certainly. I shall be delighted," he replied, very seriously. "I will keep as still as a statue."

"But I do not draw very well," I stammered, rather frightened to find my offer accepted at once; "the only portrait I have ever done was of 'One.'"

"Very well," said he; "I shall be in excellent company."

He held out a drawing-board, paper, and pencils, and turned his head so that I could get the profile.

"Will it answer like this?" he asked.

I replied, "Perfectly."

I was quite disconcerted, and he meant that I should acknowledge it.

However, I began mechanically, looking at him as he had looked at me, and thinking him handsome, as I only wish that he thought me.

But at the end of fifteen minutes I was tired, nervous, and incapable of going on. The head on my paper might have stood for anything—a judge's wig, a scare-

crow, a negro king; and I recalled my attempts of last winter when I amused myself drawing my dog, and in spite of all my efforts gave my favorite the head of a sheep, the coat of a bear, and shaggy legs which even a King Charles would have been ashamed of.

At any other time I should have laughed, but I counted the minutes, thinking always of his departure; this disturbed me, and I felt the tears come to my eyes. This was what I had sworn should not happen, and I ran to the fireplace to throw my paper in the fire, crying:

"It is impossible! I do not know how!" But M. de Civreuse stopped me.

"My portrait!" he said. "Show me my portrait; I have the right to see it."

I gave it to him without resisting. He took it and looked at it gravely; then, still just as seriously, said:

"Will you allow me to retouch it?"

I nodded, and he wiped it all out with his handkerchief. Then with four strokes he made a profile which was a caricature of his own, but so comically like it that it was impossible to look at it without laughing.

Underneath he wrote in his large handwriting:

"With the respectful compliments of the patient to the author," and held it out to me.

At that moment the doctor entered. I was sick at heart; I knew that all was over, and as I left the room I heard the carriage ordered for M. de Civreuse drive into the court. I rushed to my refuge, the drawing in my hand, and there, alone, I looked at it. But instead

of laughing, as I had done before, I saw the tears fall on the ridiculous nose, on the bristling mustache which M. Pierre had made; and it was natural enough, for the drawing resembled the original as my dream resembled the reality.

A minute after, the doctor called me back. M. de Civreuse was standing in the middle of the room, supporting himself on two black crutches, which made me feel dreadfully. It seemed to me that I had lamed him for life. I knew that I grew pale, and involuntarily I turned and stretched out my hands to the doctor.

"It is only for the first days," he said, smiling, for he understood my fear.

On the ground were the splints which had replaced the plaster for the last two weeks.

"Let us burn them together," said M. de Civreuse, pointing to them.

I picked them up as he had suggested, and we went toward the fire together.

He managed his crutches well, but the noise they made on the floor disturbed me so that I did not know what I was doing. The doctor went out to call Benoîte, and I threw the first and then the second piece in the fire.

With the third my courage came back, and, raising my eyes to M. Pierre, I succeeded in saying in a low voice, but without trembling:

"Do you forgive me?"

"Ah! mademoiselle," he cried, "I hoped there would never be any more question of that between us."

I thanked him with a motion of my head, and silently continued my work on my knees by the fireplace, almost at his feet, while he, standing, supporting himself by the mantel-piece, towered above me with his whole height. How different it all was from what I had imagined!

In the mean while Benoit entered. She came to say good-by to the traveler, and advanced courtesying, and beginning a little speech, in which she wished him good luck and a "God bless you!"

He listened to the end; then, putting aside his crutches, and supporting the wounded knee against the arm-chair—

"I can not thank you with words for all your devotion," he said, gayly; "you must allow me to embrace you."

And taking the poor old woman, who seemed stupefied, by the shoulders, he kissed her affectionately on both cheeks. Then, as the doctor called from below, "Come, come, it will be night before we get there!" he turned to me.

"Our good doctor will be kind enough to say good-by for me to Mademoiselle d'Epine," said he; "I did not wish to give you the trouble!" He stopped a moment, then more slowly, as if he were seeking for words, added: "Allow me, mademoiselle, to express to you my gratitude, not only for your care, but for the grace and good-humor with which you have enlivened the monotony of a sick-room. It is to be twice kind to be so in such a manner."

I held out my hand unable to speak, for it seemed as though invisible fingers were clutching at my throat.



He took my hand, hesitated a moment as he had done before speaking, then suddenly bent over and touched it with his lips. I had no suspicion of his intention, and it was so strange and so unexpected that my eyes closed as a mist rose before them.

When I opened them he was near the door, with Benoîte following, carrying his bag. He descended the stairs quickly and without difficulty, and got into the carriage without speaking; only, when the horse started, he leaned out, and, taking off his hat, said gravely, "Good-by, mademoiselle."

It seemed to me that my heart was sealed up by a stone, like the nuns who were shut in their coffins when I saw them take the veil at the convent, and I remembered the hole in the snow in which on a winter's day I had nearly slept forever. Why had they not left me there?

As long as the carriage was in sight I stood on the threshold of the door; then, when it had disappeared, Benoîte, who was watching me, said, "Will you come and warm yourself?"

"Yes," I said, "I am coming."

But I ran away to the bottom of the park, to the

pine-tree on which I had carved a name a few days before.

The fresh sap as it mounted escaped by the gashes, and each letter of the name wept. I rested my head against the cold bark. To the right and left, under the trees, where it was still white in places, there was no one; I was alone. I pressed myself against the friends who sympathized thus with my sorrow, and I wept like them.

Pierre to Jacques.

I write to you from the village inn where I have been for two days.

I can not say that it is equal to my nest at Erlange, or that I have a bed with columns, or a Louis XIII fireplace. The beams of my ceiling are against a background of smoke, and the walls are whitewashed—so much so, that all my clothes show the effect, and my sleeves are like those of a miller when he leaves his mill after work.

But a traveler must expect such things, and one does not always find a château for a hotel. The best part is that my knee works perfectly well. I can use my crutches with the dexterity of a practiced invalid, and I should go about more were it not for the train of children who follow me as soon as I appear.

Happy village, where a lame man can be such a curiosity, and where a crowd collects to see one go by on crutches! The species is rare, it seems.

To amuse myself, I sketch a little. Here a bit of a steeple, there a cloud, and a sheep feeding on the cloud. It is very fantastic, but my portfolios are not for the exhibition, and I would not even offer it—what would perhaps be more acceptable—the portrait of Mademoiselle d'Erlange, a head from nature which is certainly not bad! Did I tell you that I asked her to sit for me, and that she consented to put on the old-fashioned dress of my first evening at her house? But I could not have told you, as my last letter to you was written three days before I left.

Well, the morning of the Monday when I was to leave Erlange I remembered my intention to try and sketch her fanciful head, and I succeeded beyond my expectations. The water-color was very quickly done—it is only a sketch; but I think it would lose in grace what it might gain in finish, and I will leave it as it is. A smile must be sketched; it can not be settled by A+B, especially a smile like hers; and on the whole, taking into consideration the coloring, the likeness, and putting modesty aside, it is a little masterpiece!

You shall see it; it is worth a journey, and I will take it to you so as to have your approval.

Half laughing, half serious, Mademoiselle d'Erlange wished to return the compliment, and she made the most frightful little daub you can imagine, which makes me think she can never have cared for drawing.

It was thus that we spent our last hours together, talking and laughing as if the sound of the wheels of

the carriage which was to take me away had not resounded in the court.

On a funeral-pile, "solemn and expiatory," we burned together the splints which had imprisoned me for so many days, and the good-bys began.

Undoubtedly, the one who felt most was Benoîte, whom I kissed frankly on both cheeks, and who would have liked, I think, to shed a tear or so. But what could she do among such people as we? Our coolness froze her.

Next I took leave of Mademoiselle Colette with a little compliment, very courteous, very graceful, to which, however, she did not respond a word; then she held out her hand to me, and I was off.

Do you regret now the declaration that you advised me to make at the end, and do you see the absurdity of such a situation—a man speaking of love, begging, praying, laying bare his soul so as to obtain a word or look at the moment of farewell, and being received by a burst of laughter from a foolish little cold-hearted girl? For I am sure she would have laughed!

In reality, I was never more pleased to have the thing over, and to feel that my heart was calm and unmoved, like an honest warrior who retires from glory with his scars. All this makes me sleep without dreams, even on a bag of straw, and it is something to be sure of one's sleep!

My leave-taking with Mademoiselle d'Epine will be done by procuration. The doctor accepts the office;

and as for "One," I will not speak of him—was it not said long ago that "the best part of man is the dog"?

And now I will leave you; it is the hour when the flocks are let out into the village streets while their stables are cleaned; it amuses me to see them pass, and I make some fine sketches.

Pierre to Jacques.

You do not believe me, do you, Jacques? You knew the truth, and you know that for a month I have lied to you, to my head and heart, to everybody, even to this love which has taken complete possession of me, and which yet I hide as though this incomparable happiness of loving passionately were a shameful thing.

Yes, I love her! Yes, I adore her! And that bravado which you received this morning was the last. Are you satisfied?

My letter had no sooner gone just now, than I recalled the child who had taken it; I wanted to stop it, to take it back; my pride was thrown down and had vanished so completely that I looked in vain for a trace of it, and I asked myself what the ridiculous sentiment was that forbade me to confess that I had been in love for weeks, because formerly I had vowed hatred to the whole human race, and had closed my heart and written *De profundis* above it, and that this sudden defeat by a child was revolting to my pride.

It is the garland of flowers of the fairy-tale against

which the sharpest sword is broken! This time it is a smile of eighteen which has got the better of all my dislikes and mistrusts.

And I, like a fool, instead of rejoicing, was determined to go on doubting, because the pedestal of disdain and skepticism flattered my vanity and made me taller!

You are disgusted with me! But you can see, Jacques, that I am ready to do penance, and that if my heart is in the clouds my forehead is in the dust. What more do you want?

Yes, I believe in the return of youth, for I am only twenty this evening, and all my illusions have come back. I believe in everything, even in goodness! but, above all, in love; and you must not complain, for it contains everything—both wisdom and folly.

Did you really believe, my friend, that for two days I have been drawing sheep on clouds and peasants in petticoats? The truth is, I have just torn up the twentieth letter I have written her since the day before yesterday, and that I shall soon begin another; and that if I can not manage to tell her all the foolish things to which my heart tempts me, in the language that I wish to speak to her, I will go up this evening to Erlange, and I will kneel to her in the large room where I have known her, and I will tell her that I adore her.

You are thinking of my crutches! I have made a bonfire of my crutches, Jacques—a fire in which I have cast all my doubts and all my past life, so as to remember only to-day and to-morrow; and, to climb the

mountain-road, do you not think that I have the wings of love?

How I should like you to know her! Have I described her to you well in my moroseness, and do you understand that the foolishness and childishness of which I complained are perhaps what I like best in her? Nothing less than this freshness and originality were needed to revive my youth and benumbed life, as those new perfumes do which are like nothing else, and which reach even the most blunted senses.

She is a charming wild-flower which has blossomed between earth and sky for me, and for me alone. Until now she has loved but the stars and her dreams; the mountain-breeze alone has touched her, and she unites in herself all womanly graces with all the freshness of Nature.

With her hand in one of mine, and yours in the other, the world is full for me, and my happiness is so great that there is but one thing to which I can compare it—infinity.

Think of me this evening, Jacques. I am going up there; I can stay here no longer. I long for the air of Erlange. If I have to write instead of speaking, I can find a shelter among the ruins; and to write words of love will not the moonlight suffice?

I send you her portrait; I want you to see her. Tomorrow the original will be mine, or else you may keep this forever; it will be my last legacy.

April 30th.

"My God, my happiness is too great, too sudden, and it overpowers me! Help me to bear it well!" This was my first cry; and yet, half an hour later, I did not know whether I had wept, and my joy was so completely a part of myself that I could not remember that I had not always had it.

Yesterday, at about ten o'clock in the evening, I was sitting alone in M. de Civreuse's room—I still call it so—and doing nothing, my hands lying idle in my lap, but dreaming.

Benoîte had been gone some time; nothing was stirring around me, and I felt myself so utterly alone that the noise of my own movements made me tremble with fright.

Suddenly, outside, on the road to the village, I distinctly heard stones rolling and a man's footsteps.

My heart began to beat so loudly that I could count its strokes. "Some belated peasant," I said to myself; "a peddler who is returning." But when he was under my window the man stopped, and my agitation became such that the mark of the wood of the arm-chair I involuntarily clasped was printed on the palms of my hands. "It is he!" I said to myself.

He! Who? M. de Civreuse, who went off two days before on crutches? Impossible! And still, after a second, a voice which was restrained, though vibrating, and that I knew well, came up to me, and I heard the words:

"Do not be afraid."

If my life had been at stake, I could neither have moved nor spoken. I remained a moment in suspense; then a stone, the size of a walnut, very skillfully thrown, came through one of the little window-panes, and fell at my feet.

A paper was folded around it, and when I had recovered from my fright I picked it up.



The writing of M. de Civreuse covered two sides; and this is what I read:

“Colette, forgive the folly of this note, and forgive, above all, the foolish way in which I send it to you; but can anything between us resemble what goes on elsewhere?”

“Besides, Erlange is an enchanted castle at this hour; everything is shut, there is no door at which I dare knock.

“Benoîte is asleep, I am sure; there is but one lamp which shines here; that I know well, for it is toward this point, the star of my heart, that I have been walking for two hours.

“If it had been higher up and farther off, I must have come to it all the same to-night, without being able to wait for the day, because this word that I am going to say to you has been in my heart and on my lips for a long time already; because that for six weeks I have repeated it to myself night and morning; and that after having murmured to you so often that I adore

you, without your ever hearing, I want now to say it so loud that my words may not only reach your ears, but go to the depths of your heart.

"I love you. But I do not want to tell you now how I love you; I want to see your eyes and your smile while I speak to you, and I do not wish to lose one minute of your charm henceforth. I know what it is to spend two days away from it!

"Now, do not tell me that you will not have my love, and that you refuse all the life and passion which I place at your feet. Have you never thought, my poor child, how easy it would be for a resolute man to come in the night to your solitude, to take you and carry you off so far that no traces of you could be found?

"Besides, I firmly believe there are things which from all eternity are written in heaven. They are rare, but they are perfect, for God himself has signed them, and our marriage is one of them.

"Colette, in this road, where you threw me on my knees one morning without intending it, I am waiting for your answer, as you found me there that winter day.

"Forgive me the broken window; I think it is the sacred window, and I chose it knowingly, because I believe superstitiously in it, as the way happiness came to me.

"When we go away together, if the joy of carrying you off is granted me, I will take with you that little statuette you know of, to which I have vowed passionate gratitude, for without it, Colette, I should have passed by!"

As I read, passionate joy filled my heart, and I **could** not believe in the reality of my happiness. Was it possible? Was it really he? What! he loved me, he had loved me for a long time, my wish accomplished, and my suffering become a bad dream? At the same time, surprise at his long silence overcame me. Why speak so late? What reason had he for leaving me to weep as he had done?

Then, after this happy emotion, the old nature revived in me, and all the elves of mischief that my tears had drowned for two days shook their wings and flew out together.

They had been compassionate when I wept, and had kept discreetly out of sight; but this hour of joy was theirs, they claimed it, and the wildest ideas mingled with one another, each wanting its way.

"Say yes at once!" counseled my heart, pityingly.

"Never!" cried the others. "Do not forget our plans, Colette. He must be made to suffer; do not open your hands so quickly!"

So that I did not know to which to listen, and I laughed with tears in my eyes, like days when the sky is uncertain, and the rain falls mixed with sunshine—fine weather or stormy—one does not know which.

However, I went to the window and opened it. At the noise, a profile in the shadow made a sudden movement. I saw it badly, because I was placed in full light, and it was in the shadow. I guessed, however, that it was going to speak; I leaned over, and the strangeness

of an explanation at a distance suddenly struck me so forcibly that my gayety carried the day.

"M. de Civreuse," I cried, "are you on your knees?"

"Colette," he only said, "answer me, I beg."

I had not expected such a tone. As he hoped, it penetrated into my very soul; and agitated, troubled, I could not think of a word to say, and I repeated mechanically the phrase which was in my head the moment before:

"Because I had sworn to leave you there a long time, for—"

"For—?" he repeated, anxiously.

"For I have been waiting so long."

But he did not hear, I had spoken too low; besides, my voice trembled too much.

He was patient a second more, then he called to me in the same tone which had moved me so deeply.

I was incapable of answering, and I ran away, crying:

"Wait!"

There were still two blank leaves to my journal, this and another. I tore out one, and hastily, without reflecting, wrote this:

"Do not carry me off, M. de Civreuse; it would bring you into trouble with the courts; and, besides, there is no retreat where I could be made to stay if I did not wish to.

"I will tell you the best bolt you can have: my heart will be wherever you take me.

"Be very sure that I shall not forget Saint Joseph;

he has done even more for me than you think; and there is a certain old woman also, to whom I will tell you my obligations, since you are fond of being grateful.

"I will tell you the story some moonlight evening like this: first, because I like moonlight; then because, if happiness came to you on a winter morning, it has just come to me on an evening of spring."

Pierre to Jacques.

Jacques, we are engaged—give me your hand; if you follow me, I will lead you into paradise.

The curé of Fond-de-Vieux consents to come and marry us here; workmen are in the chapel, restoring it in haste: it will be ready in three weeks, and we shall have June flowers to perfume it.

I can not tell you now how I forced Mademoiselle d'Epine to give her consent; I am not sure that I did not use violence; and in revenge, under pretext of taking care of the proprieties, she never leaves us!

Strangers and comrades, we were free; engaged, and on the eve of marriage, we are watched, and that woman is my torment!

At first I thought of breaking another leg, and now I am teaching Colette Latin. We do not need much, for the word we repeat is always the same!

The evening of my marriage, faithful to my plan, I shall carry Colette off, if not to India, at least higher up

than Erlange. Sometimes goatherds pass here, and I want no spectators in my Eden.

In autumn I think all will be ready. We are restoring our ruins, and you must choose your rooms in the crumbling towers or elsewhere, one of these days ; all is yours.

There is only one spot which must not be changed. You guess which, and you must watch over it, friend, if you sometimes come to represent me, during my absence : it is the large room with oak panels into which Benoîte and the good doctor carried me one day unconscious.



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